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THE
STEWARDSHIP OF LIFE



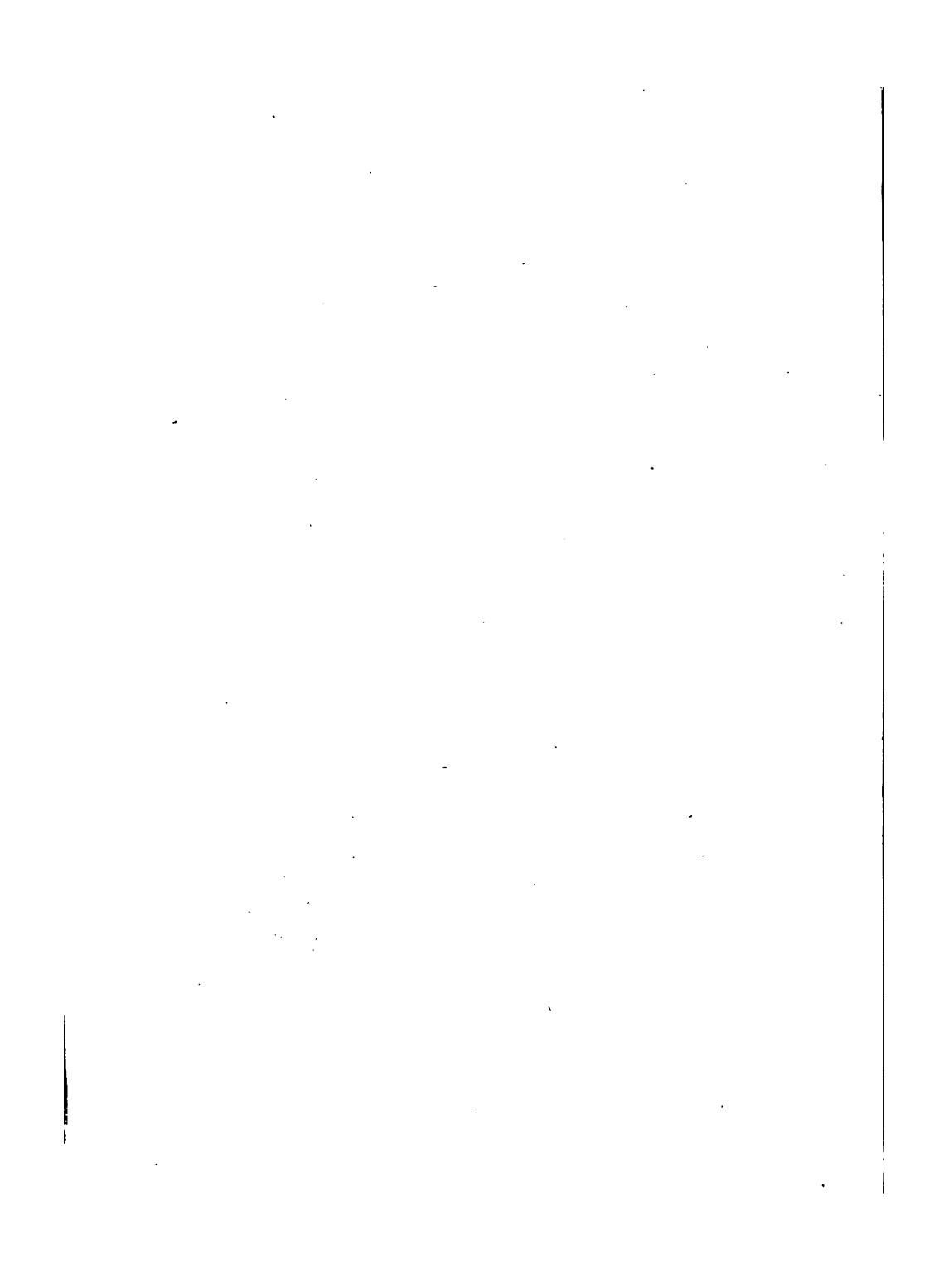
STIRLING







THE STEWARDSHIP OF LIFE.



THE STEWARDSHIP OF LIFE,

OR

Studies on the Parable of the Talents.

BY THE
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MINISTER OF
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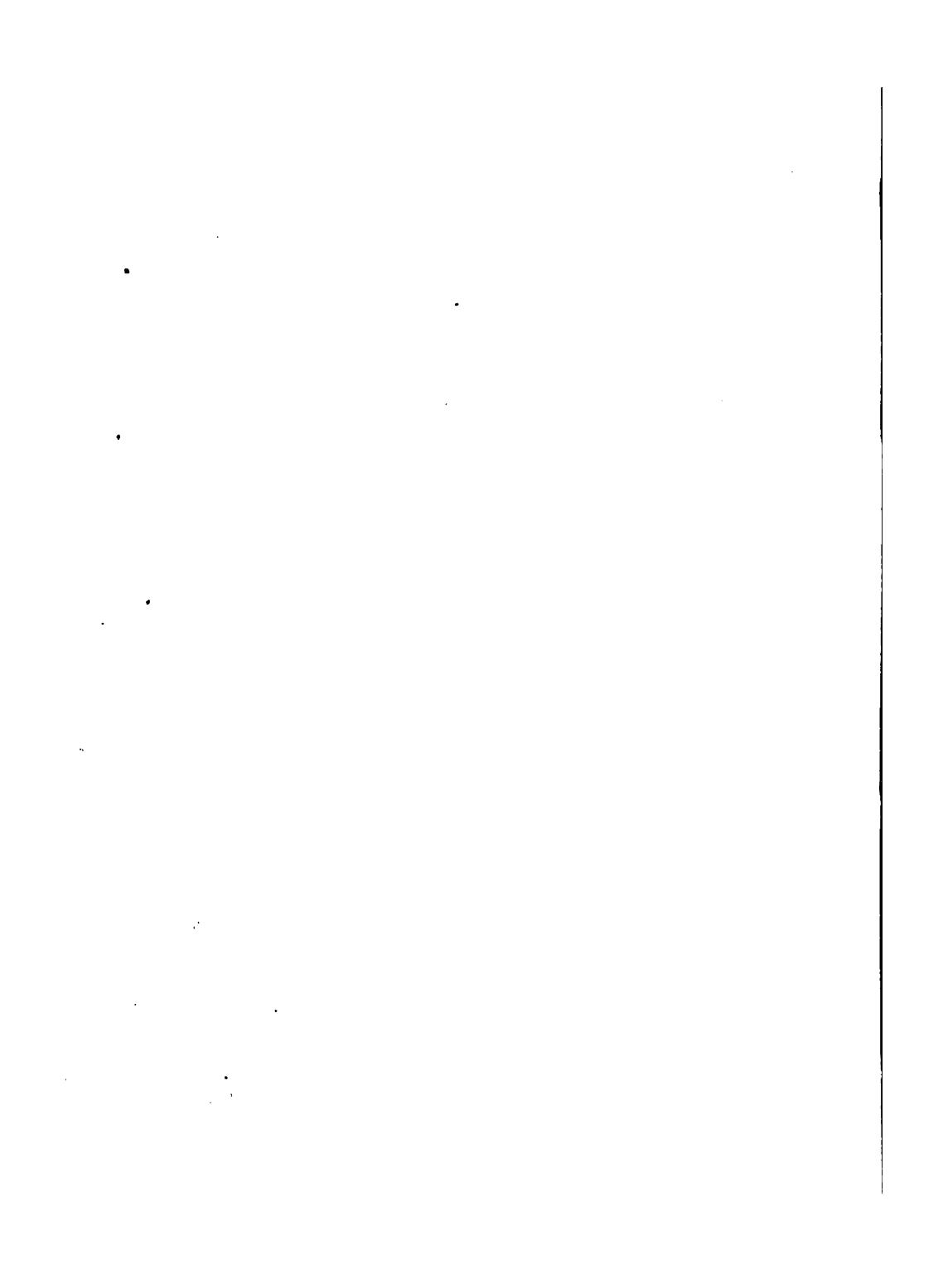
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UNWIN BROTHERS,

PRINTERS.

TO
MY PARENTS
THIS BOOK
IS AFFECTIONATELY
DEDICATED.



NOTICE.

THESE "Studies" profess to deal with the problems embodied in the Parable of the Talents. At the risk of encountering the existing prejudice against whatever wears the form of discourses, the respective parts of the parable are quoted at the head of each chapter. The substance of a few of the chapters was in part and only in part, delivered from the pulpit. The reader will however discover, the Author is inclined to think, that these studies have little in common with what generally issues from the pulpit. He will at least find, it is hoped, that they grow out of each other, advancing with the progress of the parable, and that the mattock is in the vein of vital, present-day thought.

It may appear to some as if a parable were a narrow basis for a treatise. But this feeling arises from the fact that Christ's parables have, to a very large extent, been shifted from their true place in the economy of Christian thought. They are often treated as detached illustrations of truth, as figures

on the cloth of Christian doctrine. According to a juster conception, they are the text of Christ's teaching, and potentially contain the harvest of spiritual truth. They are not narrower but broader than the Gospels in which they are imbedded. If the higher spiritual science would fill its house with the "odour of the ointment," it must break into the spikenard through the alabaster jar. The parables not only contain the base-work of any true system of spiritual thought, but being organic in form, the living soul of truth in all its attributes and with divine movement stirs through them as through a brain. The thinkers of the future, with profounder and finer insight, will set them in their true place as the vital organs of a diviner Theology.

The Author may here state, that in his treatment of the Talents he has endeavoured to steer clear of the parable of the pounds (Luke xix.), which he regards as original and independent.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
I. THE INVISIBLE CHRIST THE CONDITION OF THE CHURCH'S LIFE	1
II. HUMANITY COMING INTO TRUST	21
III. THE SPIRITUAL SHAPED BY THE NATURAL	39
IV. SPIRITUAL FORCES IN ACTION	61
V. SPIRITUAL INERTIA	83
VI. WIDENING THE TIME-HORIZON	105
VII. GOD'S ENDINGS OUR BEGINNINGS	125
VIII. MINISTRY REWARDED BY HIGHER MINISTRY	155

CONTENTS.

	IX.	PAGE
MAN'S POWER TO INTERPRET THE SPIRITUAL COINCIDENT WITH HIS MORAL LIFE	• • • •	195
	X.	
SLOTH IN ITS PHYSICAL ROOTS AND SPIRITUAL ISSUES	• • • •	231
	XI.	
THE RELATION OF SPIRITUAL FORCES	• • • •	251
	XII.	
THE REMOVAL OF SPIRITUAL CAPACITY	• • • •	273
	XIII.	
THE SPIRITUAL MAGNA CHARTA	• • • •	291
	XIV.	
THE RETRIBUTIVE STATE EXHAUSTED OF THE GOOD ELE- MENT	• • • •	311

I.

**THE INVISIBLE CHRIST THE CONDITION
OF THE CHURCH'S LIFE.**

MATT. XXV. 14.

FOR (THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS) AS A MAN TRAVELLING
INTO A FAR COUNTRY, WHO CALLED HIS OWN SERVANTS
AND DELIVERED UNTO THEM HIS GOODS.

I.

THE INVISIBLE CHRIST THE CONDITION OF THE CHURCH'S LIFE.

THE divine commonwealth lay calm and well-defined in the soul of Christ. Of that commonwealth He spoke with as much clearness as if it had been a fact of the past. The kingdom which He portrayed was future, yet He set it in so sure and strong a light that the dynasties of history are dim compared with it. Here Christ is more than a prophet, the revelation by Him is not a revelation to Him; His words are not the embodiment of an impression but the expression of the absolute. We are conscious that He speaks not only of but out of the future, holding in the eye of time the results of time.

When dealing with a kingdom which yet exists in ideal He betrays no hesitation, no uncertainty; He discloses no creative travail, no wrestling agony. With the same calm authority with which He pulls

a lily of the field to place in the bosom of care, He decides the final destiny of men and frames the chart of the new Jerusalem. He does not labour up the slopes of mystery ; firmly He stands on the "future's gleaming peak" and without encircling cloud or lightning bar delivers the tables of the future commonwealth. When speaking of the future He assumes a tone of lofty authority and strict precision. He descends to numbers and balances the aggregate of wisdom against the sum of folly. There were ten virgins, five wise and five foolish. He gives us the wail of surprised security as it knocks itself against an immovable bar, and the brief formula of doom on those whom "He knows not."

So clear and forcible is the drama of judgment that we discern the features of the actors ; so real and rational is the kingdom in its constitution, government, rewards and penalties, that we recognize it as a necessary fact—the most real of all realities. Even here on this critical and perilous height, Christ maintains His self-centred calm and carries into the future the laws of the present. This is precisely the point on which an utopian dreamer would have foundered. Let anyone not in God's secret create an ideal commonwealth and fix it in the future ; he will frame it as unlike the present as possible, the people, the laws and the

government will be different, degrees will vanish, equality will prevail, law will give place to license, judge and judgment will disappear, relationships will be only dimly shadowed, and conduct will involve no necessary issues. The very fact that a man frames an ideal commonwealth shows that he is discontented with the present order of things, and guarantees the wide distinction between his imaginary state and the real. Christ on the other hand recognizes the unity of the seen and the unseen, the harmony of the past and the future.

Hence He illustrates the hidden kingdom by parables, making the known body to the unknown; treating nature as an unthinking, and man as a thinking parable. He interprets God by man, for man is the shadow of God, and man by the world, for the universe is man on a wider scale. In the kingdoms of the seen and the unseen He sees God move along the same lines of law; sees that eternity like miracle, instead of destroying, intensifies law, working in a moment the vintage of a season. The Lord of the heavenly kingdom is like a man, His departure from earth is "as a man travelling into a far country." The bestowal of heavenly gifts is like the division of goods. The Lord on His return judges in accordance with principles fixed and known; His praise is human

praise and His censure is human censure. Had Christ not come out of the unknown He would have gone oftener into the unknown. More than all prophets He dwells on the seen, because more than all prophets He has dwelt in the unseen. He foretells less than He reveals, for He sees in the present the secret of the future. He is therefore light on nature and human life, bringing into relief lily and vine and man, as a language expressing God. The parable of the talents like that of the virgins, is an apocalypse, because a history. Both are revelations of the future, for both are interpretations of the present. Both set the heavenly kingdom in earthly types. One is the Christian genius in the repose of thought, the other is that genius shaping out its thought: one is worship, the other service. They grow together and complement each other—wedded contemplation and heroism. The parable of the virgins is more limited in range, gathering its intensest light on the closing scene, while that of the talents blends together the ascension glory and the clouds of judgment, the day of Pentecost and the day of consummation; laying the foundation stones of the new Jerusalem and letting in the glory on the finished city.

This parable is suggested by an Eastern household. The actors are a landowner and his three

slaves. There is one master for there is one God. There cannot be many slaves, for character reduces itself to a few types, as human history analyzed is an individual life. In the history of active Christianity there are fewer wrecks than in the history of contemplative Christianity. Of contemplation only half is wise, none of it exempt from sleep; of working Christianity, two-thirds are good and faithful.

The custom on which the parable rests was familiar to Christ's hearers, for Christ was not the Prophet of the dead but of the living. Slaves paying a yearly sum to their master were allowed to engage in business, or to trade with their master's capital on their master's account. Here, the slaves are entrusted with the stewardship of their lord's property. The talents are lent for a time, to be returned with interest: "Thou oughtest to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received *mine own with usury*."

The subject of the parable is the Kingdom of Heaven. It is true that the words "kingdom of heaven" are not in the original. The ellipsis various scholars have variously supplied; some reading, "For the Son of Man is like one who, intending to travel" &c.; others, as Olshausen, completing the sentence thus, "For as a man

travelling into a far country &c., so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be." But the kingdom of heaven and not the *parousia* or "coming" of Christ, is the subject of the parable of the virgins. The opening words of the present parable are evidently a transition from the former; they introduce another aspect of the same kingdom. Moreover it cannot be said that the parable of the talents points exclusively, or even chiefly, to the coming of Christ; it lays equal emphasis on His departure. It is not an event but a history.

But what is here meant by the kingdom of heaven? It is the Christian Church in its relations to Christ and Judgment. Part of the parable is matter of history; the rest belongs to prophecy and the future. The Lord has gone into the far country; from Pentecost the goods have been dividing. The talents are in the hands and hearts of the faithful. But the long time has not yet expired; the Judge has yet to come in His chariot of clouds.

The property which the master delivers to his servants is the franchise of the new kingdom. Keeping for the moment all attendant circumstances out of sight, the life of Christ in itself considered was the sublimest hope and mightiest impulse ever conferred on humanity. Had Christ not died, but

like Enoch or Elijah been translated, still He had kindled over our planet an unsetting sun. The human family would have been able to boast one sinless member; and this fact alone would have unbarred the world's prison gates and let in the angel of hope. New realms of possibility would have opened up; the fires of a new glory would have surrounded the head of the race.

The birth and life of Messiah gave rise to new emotions and set in play new trains of inquiry. The awe Christ's presence inspired was original; the weight of His unsceptred authority had no precedent. The fires He kindled in the conscience burnt with an unwonted energy; the light He let in on the soul was the birth of a new star. His rest swept into the heart with a new surprise; He entrenched Himself within the moral sense as a second and higher moral sense, so that men were uncertain whether they heard Him or their own conscience. The sight of His miracles, the majesty of His person, the profound mysteries encircling it, the blending of the finite and the infinite, have descended on the human brain like troubling angels and given wings of fire to thought and aspiration. In those thirty-three years the world ripened fast. Messiah found a spring, He left a harvest. During those years a new quantity was added to humanity and a new element inserted into history.

A fresh factor began to work behind human consciousness.

But although Christ's birth gave man a sinless Brother and conquering Lord; although Christ's life girt our world with light; although His teaching sowed the earth with truths that like the mustard seed are destined to become the greatest of all trees and dig their roots through the dust of worn-out systems; although His death overthrew all altars and opened a way between man and God, still, the bestowment of the goods, the distribution of the talents, depended on His ascension and followed His departure for the "far country." The departure and absence of Christ are the Church's wealth and power.

The Redeemer tarried forty days on earth after His resurrection. During that period the cause of Christianity made little progress. It is true that the disciples' faith was confirmed; a deeper peace filled their hearts. But Christianity prophesied over no fields of slain, made no attempt to extend her outposts, kindled no fires in the conscience, laid siege to no stronghold of crime, struck her dart through no mailed hypocrisy. Even with the risen Christ on earth, the Apostles spread their nets on Tiberias and not in human depths. As yet they had not been filled with the flow of power; the fire had not surrounded their heads nor in-

flamed their hearts. The presence of the master was the absence of the talents. This chapter of the Christian history is not sufficiently pondered by those who look for a visible, localized reign. If we are to accept the annals of the New Testament, Christianity grew more in an hour of Pentecost than in forty days of personal reign. The ascent of the King was the descent of power.

Strictly speaking, the foundations of the spiritual kingdom were not laid till after the Ascension. Then the denier became a rock. Peter looked on Jerusalem and it wept. Then and not till then, the exclusive gave way to the comprehensive ; then the Church shook into links the fetters of an obsolete creed ; then set in the reign of faith and the power of the world to come. The kingdom of heaven stepped out of parable into history. The Church, no longer gathering round a visible centre, became a sun raining forth the light and fire of a new-born day. The disciples who had fled from the cross took up the cross, and from the depths of their spirit drew the sword of the Spirit. The leavening energy was now hidden in the meal ; the new Jerusalem was planted on the hill. An enthusiasm fervent as the flame that wreathed the disciples' heads, now consumed their hearts. The unseen Lord had never been so much seen. Departing He had come nearer ; ceasing to feed the

eye He had filled the spirit. By going to His Father He had given Himself to His Church ; and the richest talent that the Church could receive was the indwelling presence of her glorified Lord. Thus what had been a coterie became a kingdom. The men who would have spent their lives in their fishing-boats, went into all the world to render an infinite life into the terms and idioms of their own finite lives.

The Redeemer's departure was as necessary as His advent. He could not redeem the world in heaven, neither could He establish His kingdom by a bodily reign on earth. Of necessity He appeared, of necessity He disappeared. His coming created a new organism, His departure inspired it with life. When He had come there were two Adams in history ; when He departed there were two Adams in humanity. His life before the cross was brief, for the world needed a fact, namely sacrifice ; His stay after the cross was briefer still, for the world needed an institution—the Church. Suppose He had remained with us from His resurrection till the present, it is questionable whether Christianity would have been heard of out of Palestine. It is certain that the Church could have had no Pentecost of storm and fire, no gift of tongues, nor power of miracle, no abiding, omnipresent Comforter, no enlightening Spirit, no diffusive philanthropy, no

consuming enthusiasm. What she sows she would have garnered. As there could have been no stewardship, there could have been no faithfulness.

Christ's visible presence, instead of interpreting would have misrepresented Deity. The adoration due to the Trinity would have been offered to the Son, and that not as God but as a mysterious, glorified man. But God is Spirit and must be worshipped in spirit. It is not hard to see why the Lord's departure and the Church's gain are connected in the parable: the day-star must vanish from the eye to arise in the heart. Nor is it less clear that the necessities involving an ascension in the past, preclude a personal reign in the future. The Christian dispensation is in the parable a human life working out its issues under definite laws; for no period or economy can be different from its representative man. Now this human life is not under one condition at its beginning, and another at its close. The period during which it shapes its future is under one continuous law. That period does not begin with faith and end with sight. The Lord is absent during all the time the servants hold the talents. Faith and stewardship are the conditions throughout. The history of freedom and development begins when the Lord goes away and ends when He returns. The Lord finds on His return more talents than He left, but this

increase depends not on His presence but on His absence.

The life of the Christian Church is a Christian life. It may outgrow its past but it cannot outgrow its own laws. It may begin with a cross and end with a millennium, but the millennium is only the cross in fruit. Development of the Church's talents, and not any change in the attitude of Christ towards the Church, will bring in the ideal age of Christianity. While the Church has the same constitution, the same mission, and the same Lord, it cannot have a different administration. If the mere visible presence of Christ can constitute a millennium it is strange that Christ ever went away. Is there then, any meaning in the words, "It is expedient for you that I go away?" It is strange that of two administrations Christ chose the worse, for if a visible reign achieves what an invisible cannot, then wisdom would select a visible reign at the beginning. If humanity at any time can be regenerated by sight, it has ceased to be humanity before it ceased to be sinful. If there be any analogy between the Church's history and the servants' career, one law must underlie that history —the law of faith. The Church must have ceased to be the Church before it can say, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our *sight*."

The parable teaches that Christ's ascension was

the world's gain ; thus fixing the date of the soul's endowment in the past. But some reverse the order, making the distribution of the goods take place on Christ's return. Now what talent is yet withheld from the Church ? What element will there be in the history of the future that is not in the present ? The earth is to be saved by salt, but the salt was working in Christ's time; the kingdom has one leaven only and that was inserted long ago. The sap of the divine spring is already stealing up the human tree ; all fruit meet for repentance must be the development of the inner, subjective life.

What would be the advantage of a personal reign ? Would it secure stronger faith, nearer communion, a profounder conception of the Redeemer's person ? Would it bring in a higher type of spiritual manhood, a more aggressive Christianity, a fuller answer to the prayer "Thy kingdom come ?" Would it quicken the pulse of law and cover the world with the Christian vine ? In presence of a visible Christ faith would not grow ; the rule would be, "We walk by sight, not by faith." Neither could hope increase—"What a man sees, why doth he yet hope for ?" The homesickness of the believing heart would give place to unhealthy content, and the eyes that looked for a city out of sight would complacently rest on an earthly Jerusalem. Con-

tact is not communion ; fellowship is of the spirit. Christ went away that He might make His abode with the faithful :—" He dwelleth with you and shall be in you." The more He is objective He is the less ours. Nor is sight the condition of knowledge ; Christ could not be understood until received by faith. It is only from within that God can be approached or known ; revelation is from spirit to spirit :—" The Holy Ghost shall teach you all things." The personal reign would give to Christianity an earthly centre ; but the moment Christianity possesses an earthly rallying-point, it ceases to be expansive. Should Christ fix His dwelling in Jerusalem, the faithful will perform pilgrimages to that sacred centre, faith will give way to vision and the calm of trust to the fever of doubt. But should the descended Saviour move from place to place, here this moment, in Jerusalem the next —then faith will be gnawed away by the tooth of uncertainty. All cannot at once enjoy His presence ; those who are favoured with His visit cannot be favoured often nor long ; the majority will still have little left but faith and a fruitless desire ; with this disadvantage, that faith for want of exercise has lost its prophetic vision and conquering energy.

The world must be Christianized or not, when Christ begins His visible reign : if Christianized

before His appearance, then His appearance did not effect the transformation. But those who expect a visible Christ are not prepared to admit that the world will be regenerated before the second advent; they would then be forced to admit that the present age contains potentially the millennial age. But they deny the power of the present to produce any such future. Christ, then, must work out the change by His visible rule. Let it be remembered that the Redeemer is not only risen, but glorified with the "glory which He had with the Father before the world was." Now is it Christ in His glory or Christ without His glory that is expected? A second humiliation is impossible; it has no ground in necessity or in Scripture.

If the Redeemer comes to reign personally, He must come in His glory. Nor is this all; His glorified saints having come up from the resurrection, will be with Him. Will glory then be the regenerative factor? Will any one affirm that the revelation of Messiah's majesty would edify the Church or win the world? Consider for a moment what this majesty signifies. John in his fearless love reclined on the Saviour's breast; but when the same John in inspired trance beheld the glory of the risen Lord, he "fell at His feet as dead." The Apocalypse burns throughout with Messiah's insufferable light. Who is the "bright and morning star?" Whose

voice is as the sound of many waters, and His eyes as a flame of fire? From whose face do the earth and heaven flee away? Moreover, from whence came the light above the brightness of the sun that smote the fiery Hebrew blind? Could the world look on such a face and live? Would such a presence inspire clay-girt men with affection, faith and repose? And yet this glory is to transform the world!

A glorified community alone can look on the glorified Christ. Are we to understand then, that the Lord will establish His throne amid a colony of glorified men? Then out of that circle He cannot move; if He but appear on a heathen shore, the terrified populations will flee from His approach, crying "Depart from us O Lord, for we are sinful men." Neither will His glorified subjects be more successful; for who has been converted by an angel? But this favoured kingdom will not seek to preach to the heathen. Faith in the personal reign is unbelief in Christian aggression.

Besides, every member of this select circle who leaves the presence of his Lord for missionary labour, forfeits the prime advantage of a visible reign—the advantage of seeing Christ. It may be safely affirmed, that he who places his happiness in beholding his Lord, will not willingly quit the presence of his Lord. A visible Christ removed by

distance is no better than an invisible Christ. But perhaps we are to believe that the whole human race will at one and the same time be regenerated and sanctified. Is this new state the result of Christ's appearing? If sight is the renewing factor, the change must be very slow. How then is Christ's coming contemporaneous with a universal, spiritual empire? And supposing that during the visible reign the world becomes the Church, how and when is that Church to be glorified? If there is no death during that period, mortal men live a thousand years, and through remaining mortal suffer loss. If there is death, there is either continuous resurrection extending over the thousand years, or there are three classes in the millennial kingdom, the mortal, the disembodied and the glorified.

What is unreasonable is not scriptural. To quote the passages precluding the possibility of a visible reign, would be to cite a large section of the New Testament. But within the limits of the parable is found a sufficient refutation. The parable sketches the kingdom of heaven; the master's departure is universally admitted to mean Christ's ascension. Now as there is only one departure, there is only one return; and that return is not to reign but to reckon; not to remain visible in a world of good and evil, but to open a door for the faithful into

their Master's joy, and a gate for the wicked into outer darkness. The world's future is left with the Church. Between the Ascension and the Judgment the Lord's shadow does not once fall on the eye of history.

We must not invert the order of God. In the early years of the world's life God appeared to men; He wore robes of cloud and flame. At last He became manifest in the flesh; but the perfect manifestation was the end of manifestation. The ascension of Christ was the inauguration of faith. Through faith Christ enters men; through faith men enter Christ. Only an unseen Lord could agitate and exercise all the powers of the soul; only thus could He invade the heart and purify the springs of life. Having passed through the veil, He stands unveiled in the human spirit.

II.

HUMANITY COMING INTO TRUST.

MATT. XXV. 14.

FOR (THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS) AS A MAN TRAVELLING
INTO A FAR COUNTRY, WHO CALLED HIS OWN SERVANTS,
AND DELIVERED UNTO THEM HIS GOODS.

II.

HUMANITY COMING INTO TRUST.

THIS is an advance from slavery to stewardship. The human race gradually rises from the grave of Adam. First God speaks in man, next He legislates for man, and last He reigns in man—conscience within conscience, will above will, love beyond love. Hence revelation is a growth, one epoch driving out another, law becoming history, and prophecy law. The race could not begin with a Moses, a John, a Bible ; it must have forgotten its lineage before a page of its history is written. Inspiration, therefore, commences with a genesis. A Bible addressed to a particular age and beginning with that age, would be no Bible at all, for in no two ages is the condition of man the same. Humanity outgrows itself ; the greatest of human greatness is still in the future.

The past is the childhood of the race. The economy of God is to make the last generation of the

world the first, and the first generation the last. To those who search the pyramid of history for the swathed mummy of a golden age, for some unapproachable type of greatness, holiness, or heroism, Christianity says, "Hereafter ye shall see greater things than these." Here, Christianity strikes out for itself an original and independent course; instead of lingering tearfully by the grave's mouth of the past, it points to the open gates of the future. It leaves the withered paradise to history, and sows the human spirit with the seeds of a new paradise. It sees time build a stair around the throne of God, each successive century occupying a higher step on that stair; it beholds the human family move from the first to the last Adam—from matter to spirit. But this movement is not the development known to philosophy; philosophy finds in human consciousness all the elements of history, and regards the world as a theatre on which man plays out the drama of his thought. It says the future can contain nothing that man does not contain, for the world's history is man developed. As far as thought is concerned, this is true; in this light any man contains all the epochs. But have all the epochs contained the entire man? Has not consciousness proclaimed the absence of an element—life? This element, this endowment, this missing quantity, Christianity restores. Man is

given back to himself, for he is given back to God. He rises higher than himself, as he possesses more than himself. Christ is not evolved, but added.

The growth and development of Scripture contain a history and a prophecy of human progress. Genesis opens a door into the world, the Apocalypse a gate into spirit ; the first book looks out on an eclipsed world, the last on new heavens and a new earth. But why this continuous growth, these epochs sloping upward into light ? There is a cross behind ; the race has found a future and an ideal ; the perfect has come into man, hence the perfect will come out of man.

Before Christ, a fraction of humanity had been trained in the divine household ; it had been put under a stern and rigorous law. From those so trained, Christ called to Himself a company of men whom He here calls His servants. These He taught in a new school ; to these He delivered His goods. Their calling was a crisis in their life ; their reception of the talents inaugurated a new era in the world. Hitherto they had been slaves, now they became stewards. The Church had been ruled from without, now it must be governed from within. The keys were hung at the girdle of humanity. With Christ then, began a new reign,—the kingdom of heaven.

At this stage of the world's history, it is hard to appreciate the magnitude of the trust committed to the Apostles and first disciples. They were the guardians of the Saviour's character; in their brain lay His earthly life and the organization of His Church. Through their eyes and heart posterity must look at Christ; from their memory and consciousness they must give the Christ to faith and history; neither less nor greater than their conception of Him. In John's history He is therefore sublimer than in Matthew's, for John is capable of profounder insight; possessing the creative he possesses also the receptive.

On the matter of the Apostles' teaching, on the fervour of their love, on the exalted enthusiasm of their life, on their conformity to Christ, hung the future of the heavenly kingdom and the destiny of the human race. Well might Christ say, "Thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build My Church." The Church in a profound sense rests on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets. They more than any men in earthly annals are seated on the throne of power. They are not great men, the embodied genius of an epoch; they are spirit, idea, life; they are roots from which the race drinks inspiration, growth, greatness.

With the transfer of the property from master to servant, freedom, individuality, begin. It is im-

possible to conceive of beings left to liberty more complete and perilous. Their lord entrusts them with his entire wealth and goes out of sight; they are rich, for they possess; they are rich, for they are free. Christ disengages the individual from the mass,—the will from the passions. In His hands personality is completed, for volition is crowned.

Had the master committed only a part of his property to his servants, his conduct would have implied a want of confidence on his part, or an absence of capacity on theirs; but his confidence in his servants' ability and fealty is complete. If Christ demanded faith in Himself, He had extended faith to men; if He asked trust, He had accorded it. With Him began the rule of reciprocal confidence: no teacher could ask the heart of his pupils like Him, for no teacher gave his heart to his pupils as He gave. Into the secrets, the Gethsemanes, the transfiguration light of that heart, He led His friends: what was dearest to it He transferred to them. What is the "fulness of time," but the hour when God can trust humanity with His Son? The pre-Christian ages lack not only the fact, but the idea of the divine confidence; they feel that they are out of God's secret—discharged, holding no office or ministry. If the gods cannot trust them, neither can they trust the gods. The crown has fallen from the human spirit. There is in con-

science a dim record of some breach of confidence ; man feels that he is not even entrusted with himself ; fate is everything, and he nothing ; there are no talents and hence no freedom. Life is a sarcasm ; man is not a factor ; he has no part to play ; he is neither a creator nor a destroyer, but a dumb atom in a frozen unity. Judaism is an advance on this state, but Judaism is law, not life ; it is nationality, not personality ; it *promises* individuality by making a nation individual, still it cannot disengage and endow the person ; it is a code, a restraint, not a franchise, a higher will.

Christ on the other hand, knows nothing of nations, of dead unities ; He separates and frees the individual, resolving the helpless mass into personal powers. He gives nothing to nations or peoples. As He is God defined, localized in human nature, not of it, ordering natural laws as His servants, so He defines and divides, gives play-room to the will, lifts the individual out of nature and necessity, withholds nothing, suffers nothing to be withheld. He looks not to the race for receptive and administrative power ; He finds it in Simon and Matthew. He puts men in possession of the talents ; and possession is administration, and administration is liberty. What is subject to our will we possess, and no more. Character is measured by volition.

Christ came in the world's minority and left in its majority. Childhood went out when the talents came in. Man became joint heir with Christ, was elected to heavenly citizenship; the statutes on stone were replaced by laws in the heart; institution gave way to inspiration.

But as spirit comes, form departs; even the Giver "goes abroad;" and as He disappears, types and the husks of exhausted ideas sink into the whirlpool of history. Christianity enters into no body elaborated by the past; it disdains to fill the pulse of worn-out systems, philosophic or religious; it depends nothing on history, on induction, form. It is life, creating its own form; aiming not at being seen; nothing if outside. It grows up through the human spirit, through arts, laws, governments—a genius behind genius. It leads the unnatural to its point of departure—the natural; begins with miracles, knowing that they are not any violation of order, but the temporary restoration of violated laws—an opportunity of seeing nature in immediate subjection to the divine will. But the beginning of Christianity is the end of miracle. The Christian soul, the new creation, obedient to God's control, henceforth takes the place of miracle. The divine footmarks on the world are footmarks of departure—not from man, but from form to spirit. The human steward appears on the field

alone, and unless history have eyes it will see nothing but man in the world. God no longer appears in the drama of human life, no longer burns along the prophet's trance ; the desert night has lost its shekinah ; the outward voice is drowned ; the heavenly pageant has faded out of the sky ; sign and miracle are past, and Christ is to the Church what the soul is to the body—the hidden inspiration of life.

All the glow and fervour, the light and glory have disappeared, to re-appear on the theatre of spirit. Search there, you will find the light, the heat, the law and the lawgiver. Christ carries inward every form that held the light, as the day hides the stars in its depths ; He brings the fulness of the God-head into manhood. The only method of deciding progress, or adjusting the claims of opposing religious systems, is to ascertain at which period or under which system God is deepest centred in the human spirit. Here Christianity stands alone, fulfilling perfectly the condition in its Founder. But the hush of the divine voice, the absence of the storm-chariot, are to the majority of men as if God had forsaken the world. All cannot discern that there is a spiritual hand on the helm of spirit. There is danger of Atheism on the one hand and of Pantheism on the other ; while the Christian genius moves on with time, these melancholy

spectres will follow after. Even the children of the kingdom appear under less restraint because they are under more; they seem isolated from God because their being is rooted in Him; they seem as without law, inasmuch as their only law is the spirit of life. The talents involve guidance; in their use there is no outward restriction, for a perfect man has come into the imperfect with counsel and strength. Christ filled a human nature with God before He filled the Church's hands with the divine dowry.

Christ's aim is to make man master of himself; that is, to redeem him at the point of desire and will. His teaching therefore is not a code of laws, but a living breath—a spirit of inspiration. Instead of laying a legal rail beneath humanity, He constitutes the human heart a chariot of fire. When He confers the gifts He goes abroad that His servants may be free—free in Him. The distribution of the property and the lord's departure inaugurate a higher education in what we may call spiritual administration. By spiritual administration I mean the faculty of putting talents to their legitimate use. This faculty involves knowledge of right and wrong; perfect liberty to choose either, and wisdom to decide on the best. Christ must have first filled the conscience with light: He must have blown His trump in the spirit and marshalled its powers—

must have set reason on its throne and invested will with its lost sanctions. Then the Christian may become a statesman over the commonwealth of inward powers, an enlightened and free steward over the manifold riches of God.

Thus the Church's gifts and resources are put into the hands of men. Christ remains out of sight that the elastic spirit may have ample margin. The Master gives no order, leaves no commands concerning the talents; the injunction is in the governing spirit, in the increased knowledge, in the capacity of putting powers to their proper end. In harmony with this method Christ wrote not His own life; He lived it and left the narration to others. He left no plan of the Christian temple; He inscribed its outline on His Apostles' spirit. He formulated no creed, but bequeathed life; He Himself is the heart's creed, supplanted by dogma only when Christianity has lost its intuition of faith. The powers which He wielded He transfers to men, retaining of course His divine and essential prerogatives. The world is to be evangelized, yet He proposes no system of operation, lays down no plan of procedure. He simply baptizes His followers with the consuming fires of love and pours into their heart the chalice of His suffering. He saw that Christianity would create new agencies, such as the Sabbath-school and Christian literature,

yet He does not even mention their name. He conferred on the Church powers and resources, with liberty to employ them according as reason and circumstances might dictate. It is precisely here that Christ is greater than all legislators, because He legislated none. It is here that His consciousness of power stands out unapproached and divine. Let Him only lay in His sacrifice the conditions of power, give Him for theatre Gethsemane and Calvary, and He will sway the soul from a new point and with a new power.

Here, too, Christ's conception of human dignity breaks forth. In His circle of thought, every man is capable of direct divine control, and rises in the spiritual side of his being into contact with God. Every man is a first cause in the moral world, creating a world of issues and influences and starting it on its eternal line. But if Christ reveals man as a being holding in his will the germ of a moral universe, it is that He may help us to take the measure of our accountability. Surely this revelation is fuller of thoughts that lead to sighs than of panegyric. It is from this point that we must look into our own futurity; here we catch the meaning of our present. Christ has conferred on us heavenly talents; like the servants we are in possession, yet free. The Lord is to all purposes in a far country as regards coercion; He gives us ample scope to

increase or to hide : the virgins were free to sleep, the servant to put the earth between him and his dowry. Let the Churches of Christ ponder this ; let them consider that they are in charge of the world's future ! And if every human form covers a moral creator, what must be the Church's power as a " principle of origination ? "

The transfer of property from lord to servant—in other words, the advent of Christianity—afforded new space for the development of character. The new trust of which we have spoken brings to light new attributes. Few will be prepared to deny that the loftiest and most comprehensive characters have been formed and fostered by the Christian spirit. We cheerfully admit that Abraham, Plato, and Socrates were great characters ; but is not the greatness of Abraham the sovereignty of his faith, whereby he anticipated the day of Christ ? Drawn by the affinities of his mighty spirit, as by coursers of fire, up to the cross, he beheld the light and breathed the spirit of the Christian kingdom. No wise man will cite Plato and Socrates as fair examples of heathenism ; in them you see not the Pagan genius, but a confused rehearsal of Christianity flitting across the theatre of their spirit. Abraham is far in advance of them in point of moral nobility, and yet few perhaps will affirm, that Abraham is so complete and symmetrical a character

as the Apostle Paul. In faith, he may be as great or even greater, but he lacks the rapture of love, the magnificent enthusiasm, the furnace of passion that burnt in the soul of the Apostle. To affirm that Christ develops a new and loftier human character, is simply saying that He is superior to Moses and that Calvary is in advance of Sinai. One of the rarest talents entrusted to men is the ideal of a sinless life—a life cast in human mould, yet higher than the heavens. The Redeemer's death afforded the idea and the example of perfect self-abnegation. From the cross have sprung an army of martyrs who entered heaven through doors of fire; and another army no less illustrious, who carried the fires in their hearts over continents of heathenism and death. If Golgotha was a skull, it was an empty skull; but Christ filled it with brain and life; it has been prolific in ideas, in spiritual Iliads, in great acts and men. The rods of strength grow out of the cross. The first Christian comes forth on the world fresh as a hymn inspired by a hitherto unknown and higher muse.

Christ regenerates human powers and yokes them to activity. His presence has curtained the world with a new atmosphere: the very circumstance of His walking across the earth has confronted the mind of man with the profoundest problems. The effort to analyze and fathom His character is a

divine employment compared with the quibbles of the Sophists. Philosophy has found in Him height and depth. It is certain that through Him the human intellect has experienced a resurrection. Calvary and not Parnassus, has become the inspiring mount; on its slopes Milton breathed the gale of inspiration; in its light philosophy threw off her dotage and girt herself for the discovery of truth. When you have robbed the world of its Christian literature, you have taken away whatever is sublimest in song, profoundest and truest in philosophy, and most massive and elevated in eloquence. From Golgotha what sculptors and painters have sprung! Every attribute of Christian character, every Christian doctrine and parable has passed through human genius to incarnation. Christ, too, is indirectly the creator of science. It is true that He teaches no science but that of life ; that however is enough. When man has come to God by a spiritual approach, he will seek to reach Him also through the intellect ; he will search for Him in the depth of thought. In possession of the science of life, he will dig for the tables of mental and physical laws.

Challenged by Christ's person and claims men have bored the earth, fished the seas, anatomized the negro and driven the stars through a critical process. In searching ancient philosophy, history,

poetry, to discover how far He was indebted to the past, they unconsciously learnt the science of criticism. The appeal to stones and suns has called into the field a new ordnance—namely Christian philosophy. It is to Christianity and not to Paganism that the universe gives up its secrets: man finds the keys of the world when the seals are rent from his own spirit.

But it is not on the intellectual side only or chiefly, that Christianity confers new talents. Appealing to the spirit mainly, it exercises and enlarges the entire man. It presents with a new object of love and endows with a new capacity. By it faith is strained and therefore strengthened. It opens in the heart a burning gateway of hope, through which the soul passes into God and God into the soul. Self-denial has a new field of exercise; compassion dissolving in its own tears is a recognized inmate of the soul. Divine earnestness, lovely humility, ripening beauty of spirit, repose of heart, become attributes of the Christian man. To philanthropy is afforded new scope, to memory a fresh trust, to anticipation an unlimited field. The new gifts work out new attributes of character—holiness, rest, power. As the world has only one Christ, so the Christian type of character stands alone; it is a “new creation.”

Enlarged possession, weightier trust, higher posi-

tion, make a good man better and a great man greater. Room for self-denial kills selfishness ; the opportunity of giving invigorates charity ; new exercise of compassion is new power of compassion. Christ opens a new world in which to be, a new world in which to work and suffer. In Him humanity comes into its ministry, its cross, its vicarious lot.

But as greater talents, greater powers and facilities of influence, make good men better and nobler, so they make bad men worse ; not only worse than their former selves, but worse than the former wickedness of the world. The wider the theatre on which a man moves as a bad first cause, the wider will be the ring which he fills with his deadly issues. Possession opened a rent between the servants ; two rose, the other sank. And so the fulness of time alone could witness the maturity of guilt : the age that saw God manifest in the flesh saw Satan revealed. The period that brings Christ, brings Judas, Pilate, and the murderers of our Lord. It is here that we see the depth of Simeon's vein of prophetic thought, when he said, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel ; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

III.

**THE SPIRITUAL SHAPED BY THE
NATURAL.**

MATT. XXV. 15.

AND UNTO ONE HE GAVE FIVE TALENTS, TO ANOTHER
TWO, AND TO ANOTHER ONE ; TO EVERY MAN AC-
CORDING TO HIS SEVERAL ABILITY ; AND STRAIGHT-
WAY TOOK HIS JOURNEY.

III.

THE SPIRITUAL SHAPED BY THE NATURAL.

SPiritual powers are a gift, not a growth; they are as little the result of culture or development as the soul is the effect of physical organization. While therefore Christianity is a fact in human history, it is unlike any other historical fact. An angel probably could not account for the murders, persecutions, wars, intrigues and brewing passions which constitute the framework of human annals. A man can, because he is a man. Looking into his heart he perceives an unwritten history exactly corresponding with the written; there, fretting behind the bars of restraint, emerging from their hidden depths, or sullenly crouching in their lair, he discovers all the furies, murders, wars, deceits, persecutions, passions, that seethe and wrestle in the biography of the world.

40 *THE SPIRITUAL SHAPED BY THE NATURAL.*

He sees that time simply drives the evil spirits out of man into history, which is merely the evolution of man's moral and intellectual natures; that sin in all its aspects, degrees and forms, that genius in its many-coloured vest, that the moral and mental spheres moving across the world, are reducible to man and are sufficiently accounted for, when man is given as a first cause. He can also give a reason for the spiritual cry that floats along the surface of time, for the many religious systems which have swept across the historic stage: in every man's spirit there is a Plato.

But by no analysis or searching of heart, by no sounding of inward depths can a man account for Christ. Just as his knowledge of himself and of humanity deepens, the conviction grows that, humanity being given as a premiss, Christ is not the conclusion. He perceives that Christ is not potentially enfolded in the human spirit, waiting for occasion to walk out on the world; that no analysis of mind and spirit can bring to light the germ, or even the idea of Christianity; and as he cannot discover Christianity latent in the human mind, neither can he discover it in history up to a certain point. Who ever carried in his breast the prototype of Christ? Will all the religious systems analyzed, yield Christianity? It requires no elevation of mind, no

spiritual insight, to perceive that Christ is not of this world, as His kingdom is not of this world. He begins and ends under new conditions: He meets the common hostile forces on His progress, yet is never once worsted or conquered. He is a new system wheeling its spheres of thought and light through wreck and darkness. So high is He lifted out of the groove of our fallen lot, that in Him the consciousness of sin is absent.

To the reverent student of the Scriptures and the human heart, Christ and the religion He taught are supernatural; the Word becomes flesh, flesh does not produce the Word. Messiah descends on humanity from a point outside the world; His religion aglow with uncreated radiance, first appears to the world, not emerging from its spirit, but knocking at its gates. It cannot for a moment be received that He was merely a sinless man, an outgrowth of spiritual genius. If He was only a sinless man He was the miracle of humanity; for no sinless life preceded Him and no sinless life has followed Him. If born without sin He is a miracle, as He is out of the course of human life: if being born in sin He lives and dies sinless, He is a greater miracle still; then the thorn bears grapes, a clean thing comes of an unclean,—a fallen nature in a fallen world accomplishes what a sinless nature in a sinless world failed to accom-

plish. If it be maintained however, that Christ was inspired by the Spirit and upheld in an unparalleled manner, I reply, no man can be inspired or upheld beyond the point of personal freedom. To upbear him irresistibly is to deprive him of liberty, and to forbid the exercise of his will is to rob him of character; he may be faultless, but his perfection is the perfection of a machine.

The life and sacrifice of Christ are a supernatural dowry. The servants could not boast that they had always held the talents, or that the wealth had come down to them from their fathers. It is not a transfer of wealth from equal to equals, or from one human being to another. This is decided by the respective social stations of the giver and the receivers; the former is a lord, the latter are servants. The condition of the servants prevents them possessing the property within themselves: but the servants and not the lord, represent humanity; and to make the parallel perfect of a mere human Christ, we are to suppose that one of the servants became a lord and conferred on his former fellow-servants what he himself did not possess! What man can give to man we know: pagan humanity reached its highest development in Plato; and Plato was great because he gave the world a profounder knowledge of its wants and more keenly felt his own. He is a ray of light fall-

ing athwart the human spirit, revealing its emptiness. He descends into the soul's depths, he discovers traces of wealth, grandeur, divinity; he finds in the spirit an altar to the unknown God; he digs from the ruins of the soul the ideal of its lost youth; he bequeaths thoughts, speculations, questions, system; but he brings no life, no talents, no redemption, he sees without possessing, and therefore reveals without imparting.

There was then a point of time when the servants received a new inheritance to which they could lay no natural claim: there was also a point of time when the earth upbore a Being whom it could not number among its subjects; when the kingdom of heaven with its Prince, laws, rewards and penalties became inserted among the empires of the world and challenged the attention of history. This kingdom begins not when philosophy is in flower, but when it has run to seed; it lays hold of the world in its decomposition and buries its living germ in the soil of worn-out systems; it is founded on the acts of a life little indebted to the past—a life that has drawn nothing from the springs of Greece, that owes nothing to learning and philosophy—a life fresh as the first life, embodying not ideas, deductions, but principles, laws, virtues; unrelated and original, as if systems and philosophies had never been. The corner stone of Christianity is neither

44 *THE SPIRITUAL SHAPED BY THE NATURAL.*

reflection nor genius, but a cross. Had Christianity been the outcome of the human mind, it would have worn the marks of labour on the mental anvil, it could have been at best only a circle of ideas, of laws : but ideas neither redeem nor satisfy : they are not life, spirit, God ; what usury can they yield ? Is the world saved by reflecting on its loss ? Spiritual talents are needed; a supernatural hand must confer them. Even revelation is not enough ; that is only light : there must be a gift, a new element ; there must be life, power, Christ.

In the parable of the sower, the world appears destitute of the germs of truth and life till the Son of man sows it with the living Word. So here, man is a slave bound down under the poverty and issues of sin, till Christ breaks into the earth with His Gospel and divides His goods, giving to all of His fulness, even grace for grace.

But although redemption is a divine system proceeding from God, and therefore descending on humanity from a point outside the race, its nature and character are determined by our human condition : our state moulds the scheme that is to alter our state. So deeply does this law enter into the economy of grace, that God has no choice of instrumentality wherewith to carry redemption into effect. He must be identified with our ruined lot ; the Divine must be enshrined in a human nature—a

nature in no sense different from our own. As Christianity is redemption, it is intensely human in its approach to man. It brings into his midst a deeper manhood, touches him with warm, human hands, resolves itself into a Person, a life, an act in that life. At its point of contact with us, it is no higher than we; there, its light is broken as we are broken, it is partial as we are partial: but out of our lost human depths it slants upward into other depths. It is not the same to any two men, for it adapts itself to the capacity of each; it is only a pound to him who can only receive a pound. Here we are to look for the explanation of the fact that many sincere men see in Christianity nothing divine: they can see that it gains breadth as a system of philosophy gains breadth, as it reaches its highest point of development; but they are not able to distinguish between development towards the finite and the infinite. If man begins to develop himself or his thought he moves toward the infinite; if God moves, whether to create or redeem, it is toward the finite. Man achieves most for man when likest God; God does most for humanity when He is likest man: in other words, God's thought has reached its development when it becomes human, man's when it has become divine. Christian redemption ends where any human scheme of redemption begins—in man; its terminus is the

other's point of departure. Viewed here, both are human, for one is fashioned by man, the other for man. In both cases it is a man who undertakes to redeem the world : but in the one man are life, talents, God ; in the other no more than a capacity for these.

God treats man as man, even in his fall. Redemption undertakes no creation of functions and faculties ; if it did it would not be redemption, neither would the person affected by it retain his identity. If any new organ be inserted in the soul, there can be no sense of loss or restoration as far as that organ is concerned ; but in the experience of the redeemed, the sense of having been lost is commensurate with the sense of salvation. Even when Christ comes among men it is not as a new organ. He sinks into the world's heart as a new conscience, but still as a conscience. As regards His humanity, the difference between Him and us is purely spiritual. Among His faculties there is no sleep, no death ; hence His awful shrinking from the very shadow of death. In Him, for the first time, we see every power of mind and soul in living play. Nothing predominates because nothing is dead ; fancy, imagination, reason, are held in perfect balance : reason in Him is a mode of love and love a mode of reason ; all His thoughts, reasonings, words, are the shrine of life, soul, God. "The words that I

speak unto you are life ; " and for this reason we must not go to His teaching for examples of fancy, imagination, creative conception and pure reason. He is not an attribute, but a man, not an angle but a sphere. We, unlike Him, have sin and therefore death : our soul like the sacred candlestick in Titus' arch, retains all its branches, bowls and curious workmanship, but the oil and flame are gone. But Christ comes that we may have life, and He is more hopeful than other teachers and prophets, because He sees this eternal life in its true relations to man, not as needing to create, but as simply entering into an already existing soul-organism.

There is still in man an ability—not the ability to conceive and carry out redemption, but the power to accept redemption. Hunger is hunger though it feed on husks ; and the soul is not the less capable of enshrining God because it can afford asylum to legions of devils. The New Testament record of those possessed has a grim significance : the " strong man's house" is there although the inmate be not God. Nay, the catalogue of crime is the measure of the soul's capacity. The blacker the guilt the more clearly is the bad eminence of its author seen. How massive the bars of the human spirit, when the scorching fires of remorse, vengeance, passion, cannot burn them through !

The servants were rational, responsible men before they received the talents ; they were judged capable of intelligent possession. Even he who had least ability was entrusted with a talent ;—teaching us that to have a human nature is to possess a divine capacity. There is sufficient natural stock upon which to graft the supernatural ; hence Christ assumes much in His work and teaching. He assumes the natural and adds the supernatural. As if man were all too conscious of his need, He begins His kingdom with a gift ; and the gift is such as to show that the giver has passed through all the spirit's barren depths. The soul has expressed the range of its hungry capacity in its ascents and descents after God—in its frenzy of worship, whereby it breathed divinity into its own creations. It is therefore met by Christ in the most practical manner ; He comes to it as bread and flows into its dry channels as water of life. He gives "to every man according to his own ability," and in the act of giving, disappears, rises into the heavenly depths, which is, but to sink into the soul's depths. As He meets the soul with reality, facts, gifts, talents, so He puts it on a course of practice, of acts, of life ; He starts it on a second career of probation.

As one looks on the distribution of the talents, he feels himself in a new paradise. Humanity is

no longer barren ; it is trenched with springs and streams and sown with futurity. As in the first garden, heaven and earth have entered into contract. There is a divine hand stretched out in gifts, there is a human hand extended to receive. Adam must preserve his innocence, the servants their faithfulness ; he is master of the future, so are they. Under Christ the world becomes a garden of probation. The cross is the tree of knowledge of good and evil : he who inserts it into the architecture of his life, stands ; he who acts as if it were not, falls. It is a great truth and worthy of all acceptation, that every man is permitted to become an Adam—with this advantage, that whereas Adam started from the point of innocence and ignorance, we begin at the point of knowledge and grace.

The grand aim of redemption is to build up man into spiritual perfection ; so to enfold him in the divine nature that the divine attributes shall set themselves eternally in his spirit. But God cannot *will* a man into perfection of character. The highest being that God can create is one of beauty, purity and innocence ; but such a being is destitute of experience, he will need to descend into the field of trial, he must pass through the furnace of temptation. If he stand, his character is established ; if he fall, he but shows that innocence is not character. Christ does not affect to save apart

from the necessary perils of probation. The New Testament has its test by talent, as the Old has its test by an apple; and in this fact there is a deep significance: descending on its sides we see farther than elsewhere into the spring of evil. Innocence and will are not likely to walk far together: will carries within itself the roots of the forbidden tree.

Grace makes no attempt to fence us in from the fiery ordeal of trial. True, there is an "armour of God," but that armour implies an enemy and a warfare. Satan is as free to walk our earth now as before the death of Christ. From the Christian's closet there is a way downward as well as upward. The gates of two solemn possibilities open before every one who receives into his heart the life of God.

And thus, Golgotha is the complement of Eden; the one is related to the other as parts are related to each other. In the one, humanity strikes root, in the other it breaks into flower. The fall is not an accident and redemption is not an afterthought. If God make man, God must be made man; for unlike other creations, man can ruin himself; no flaming swords are planted around his will. The second probation therefore, begins where the first suffered wreck, namely at the point of freedom. The new man passes through the same process as the first man: both start like freighted ships on a

perilous sea ; both have their conditions, restraints and responsibility. The gateways into wrong are left unguarded. Adam must move within the borders of his innocence, of his paradise, in constant view of the central tree. Could he have traversed the world, set continents and seas between himself and paradise, he would still have carried within his personality the tree of fatal fruit.

Thus the Christian has his prescribed field in which he must play out his little drama. This field is girt by the measure of his capacity and the extent of his endowments. The talents and he cannot be separated ; he carries them in his heart. If he bury them, he himself is their sepulchre. Thus around us are thrown the end-rings of many chains. We are related, bound, ensphered in circumstance. Who has not caught himself willing and creating a new order ? Who has not been rent with pain on awaking to find himself a man ?

I observe further, that while Christ starts men on a new course of trial, He makes the natural man the father of the spiritual. The three servants are different without talents, they are different with them. Among the three were eight degrees of ability; among the three were distributed eight talents. In adjusting their possession the Giver has regard to what they *are*. The new endowment alters not their relations ; he who had

most receives most. The lowest in the scale of ability is the lowest in the scale of grace ; in other words, the natural determines the spiritual. If any object that this rule is unjust, I reply that a different rule would be unjust, inasmuch as the degree of the gift is the measure of accountability. Whether is it fairer to give to a man possessed of one degree of ability, five talents or one ? Is it fairer to endow him according to his ability or beyond his ability ? It is enough to say that in the one case failure is crime, in the other necessity.

There is no stiff frozen fate here : grace appears not as an unalterable quantity, parcelled out to individuals from eternity—something that shapes all other circumstances to its figure. On the contrary, it is the wine that conforms to the mould and capacity of the vessel ;—first “that which is natural and afterwards that which is spiritual.” The fact that natural capability can be developed receives daily proof, and lies at the root of education. No parent would send his child to school, if he did not believe that training enlarged his mind and strengthened his powers. That the intellect matures and invigorates itself by its own exercise, is a fundamental article of the civilized world’s creed. Now, if by any mental culture, if by any drill of powers, if by any exercise of the moral nature, one degree of capacity can be added to the

original of a man's ability, then it is evident that we ourselves determine in a secondary sense the measure of our spiritual attainments. It were strange indeed if man could thrill his influence along the nerves of our planet; modify, combine and conquer its forces; change its temperature, smooth the wrinkles out of its face and lay the lines of enterprise beneath the roots of its hills, and yet could not affect for good or ill, his physical, mental, or emotional nature.

That man has the power of acting on man and starting him on a higher or lower rail of being and experience, few will deny. Of all the fields of human operation, humanity is the most plastic. The system of nature confronts us as a world of settled law and order, as a system where forces are formed, not forming; but in every home, in every school, in every church, a new empire takes shape and figure. Every parent, teacher and minister is permitted to witness the acts of a new creation. The framework of character is laid, the pillars of manhood reared before their eyes; and I maintain that they can throw an influence into this rising kosmos, which will determine its laws, its capacities and its forces—an influence which will mould it into a sphere, or shatter it into a lawless wreck. He who heaves out into wider compass the capacity of a single soul, creates a new basis of spiritual power

and originates a currency of heavenly talents. He is next to a creator who makes room for the Creator.

I do not say that the three servants had equal endowments to begin with. He is a dull observer who does not see that we enter life with different capacities. Our ancestors live in us. Were there no other lines of distinction the lines of latitude would distinguish us. However a man may end, he begins as an epitome of his country. We are not asked to choose on what soil our cradles shall be rocked. The powers, tastes, individualities, that latent sleep in our infant brain are there before our will ; but they are there as metal unwrought awaiting an artificer. It would be rash to assert that the servants' respective ability was as unequal at the beginning of life as when the lord divided his goods among them. Did the ablest possess a capacity fivefold greater than the weakest, in infancy and boyhood ? If the relations kept pace up till the time when the talents were distributed, it is certain that they did not afterwards. If the lowest improved his natural capacity as faithfully as the highest, he failed to cultivate his spiritual talent as the highest cultivated his. The five talents were doubled, the one was buried. From this are we not entitled to infer, that he who increased his talents increased his natural ability,

and that he who hid his talent hid his natural capacity likewise? Is it likely that the servant who was unfaithful in the spiritual was faithful in the natural? or that the man who put his spiritual wealth to interest was content to preserve the bare principal of his natural gifts?

The Church has yet to learn the science of laying a basis for the work of the Spirit. She will yet study more profoundly Christ's reasons for creating a capacity in the mind of His disciples, before He let in the currents of spirit. Christ's words were so many steels hewing out wider scope for the spiritual element. When we have clearly defined the points at which culture and grace intersect each other, we have made great advance in spiritual science. We may leave too much work to the share of grace. The Spirit does not teach the alphabet, or demonstrate Euclid. His office is not to create, but to inspire. To depend on grace for culture of mind and formation of proper habits, for soul-furniture, for widening the circles of capacity, is to ask the seasons to build our ships and plough our fields. Christianity like Christ, is the divine in the human; it is a life, an inspiration; it is also an education, a training, a discipline. It impresses into its service the law of Moses and the institutes of the conscience. It baptizes with water from the river of life all institutions, forces, uses, exercises,

that determine, elevate and expand human character. Hence no education is secular, no study that invigorates the mind is ungodly; no teacher who lets into the soul the light of science is opposed to Jesus Christ. No education is so near being ungodly, as that which invokes the spiritual without making room for it in the natural.

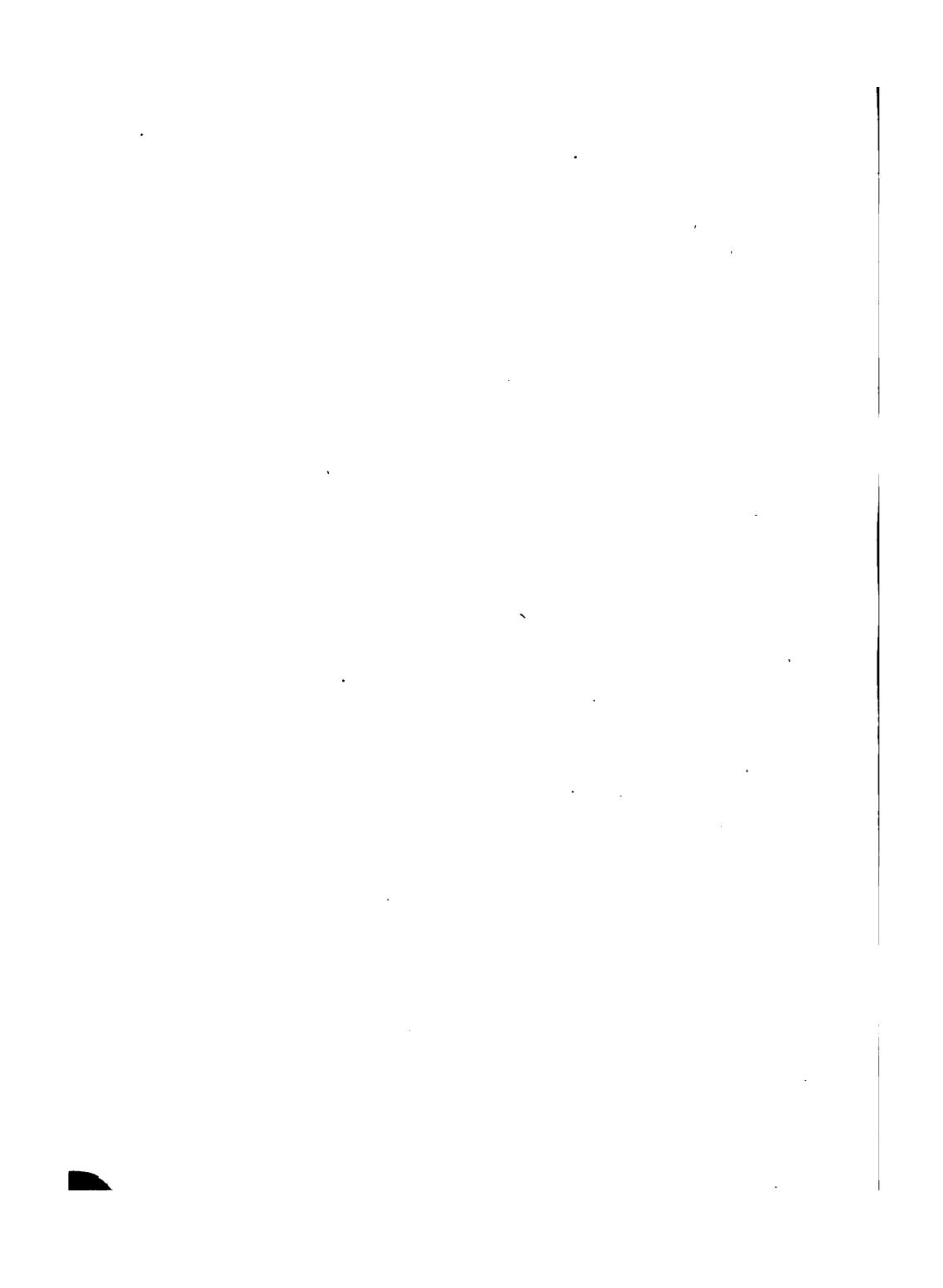
Let it be received as an article of faith, that grace is distributed according to law and measure. The law is, "To him that hath shall be given;" the measure is the extent of capacity. In the kingdom of God, the greatest ability is the greatest power. Christ sets the strongest brains and hearts to the stiffest toil. Wherever the spiritual has arisen in massive proportions, it has had a broad human basis. Moses becomes God's prime minister because he is "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians;" Paul is a leading apostle of the true faith, because he had been an apostle of the false. He fashions the weapons of the Christian armies, for he had shaped syllogisms on the anvil of Gamaliel.

God's grace never fails for want of power; it often fails through lack of room. It comes as seed and ends as harvest, wherever soil is found. But without a soil for its reception, without a furrow where it can anchor its roots and develop the mysteries of its power, it is as impotent as the myths of Greece or the platitudes of the Sophists. Leaven

without meal makes no bread: a mustard-seed and a stone do not compose a tree.

The nursery, the school, the warehouse, the church, the customs of society, the drill-practice of morality, the prevailing tone of thought, are each a potter's house where men's capacities are shaped and determined. If sand or a crack be left in the vessel, it must remain. And should abundant grace come into such a leaky character, it would only run out in uninspired enthusiasm, to be followed by empty apathy.

Mark then the forces, habits, errors, that reduce men's ability, and send forth against them the destroying angel of indignation. Whether it be scientific unbelief, priestly usurpation, chill fatalism, worship of the past, consecrated ignorance, varnished deceit, or immobility of thought—slumbering within the crib of a narrow creed—arise ye servants of God, spurn it from your midst and smite it into ruin!



IV.

SPIRITUAL FORCES IN ACTION.

MATT. XXV. 16, 17.

THEN HE THAT HAD RECEIVED THE FIVE TALENTS WENT
AND TRADED WITH THE SAME, AND MADE THEM OTHER
FIVE TALENTS. AND LIKEWISE HE THAT HAD RECEIVED
TWO, HE ALSO GAINED OTHER TWO.

IV.

SPIRITUAL FORCES IN ACTION.

THE master's chariot has hardly vanished when two servants gird themselves for service. They require no orders; the injunction lies in the instinct of the new life. "Straightway he went abroad;" and straightway they move to action. They start to trace the initial line of a spirit hymn, for their hearts are hot with the breath of a holy muse. The life of God soon asserts itself. Ideas become acts at Pentecost. The point at which a man receives the heavenly gift sees him no more. Has a man been baptized with spirit? Look not for him at the scene of his baptism; he is either in the wilderness creating a paradise, or in the field of the flesh digging a grave for the spirit. The two servants are now first causes for good; they originate a new train of circumstances and broaden the basis of being. What was not theirs becomes theirs; fresh talents of a like kind are added to the original

SPIRITUAL FORCES IN ACTION.

endowment ; their life pushes forward the boundaries of its empire, creates for itself broader ranges, and while it multiplies its talents, throws around them wider circles of capacity. The ability to use grows with the trust : when the man of ten talents is next endowed, it must not be on a fivefold but on a tenfold scale. Here we see the spirit widening its dominion in the mind, and the mind its dominion over the flesh. The spirit of man at least is not a fixed quantity ; five may become ten and two four. Indeed nothing in the divine kingdom has attained its growth ; if there seems limitation, it is the limitation of the seed-shell ; if there seems completeness, it is not the completeness of result. We are in an order of causes, hints, movement, and nothing has more blighted human progress than a belief in the contrary. Creed and dogma proceed on the assumption that there is no movement of spirit, no revolution in the same life. What they found an untruth they have left a fact ; as far as their influence has extended they have created immobility. If we are to have creeds and dogmas, let us remember that the creed which is written when the Church has five talents, must be buried when she has ten. He who numbers and defines the five talents is likely to make much of the fact that they are divine, and to infer that nothing can be added to them ; he will likely reject the other five as not having come from

God, without inquiring whether they bear the same mint-mark and whether God can give at many times and in many ways. We often deem that as complete in itself, which is only a cause waiting on us to link it with a wider result. It is the half of wisdom and the half of life to *move* what the world regards as fixed; to be causes behind causes, moving them onward to their ends, as the faithful servants set the talents in motion and thus in the way of working out God's design. It is by trade, by circulating the talents through the spirit, that they increase in number. If they are set in the inflexible, the immovable, they continue unincreased; and yet the general way is to give to the divine a close-fitting, earthly setting, to force revelation, knowledge, experience, spiritual life, into the casts of hard formula. In a profound sense, revelation grows, when placed in contact with a living spirit. It is a germ-principle, requiring to be lodged in the field of spirit before it can be fully developed. Between the talents and their legitimate issues, comes in the condition of trade. The talents as they come from the master's hand seem to be complete and to involve no others; but they embody only half the divine idea; in the five and two are potentially other five and two. In like manner, revelation is regarded as a fixed quantity, affording no room for discovery; whereas half its sphere lies

concealed in the human spirit and in the depths of the world's law; so that in nine cases out of ten, a discovery in physical science or an advance in psychology, is an advance in our knowledge of revealed truth. Time strikes the keystone out of all creeds, and flings aside the dogmas of yesterday as unfit to hold the wine of to-day. It is in the armour of the creeds and not of the truth, that science has left its sword-rents. But who deplores the waste of marble when the steel is in the hands of Michael Angelo? Who cares for waning institutes, decrees and articles, when through their loss he more clearly sees the form of living truth?—the same truth that the first Christians held, but in larger, wider measure; for between them and us lies the exchange of time. The fathers held the principal, we hold the increase—if we can only make room for the truth, that each new phase of the world's thought and life calls forth fresh bloom and fruit on the tree of life.

We return. The inflow of the new life is not satisfaction; it is thirst, hunger, hope, expectation, profound longing, noble discontent. The five talents suggest other five. The heart yearns to drink deeper measures of truth and light. He who is richest endowed is most constrained to augment his endowment; and he who is satisfied with his talent to-day, will be reconciled to his sin to-

morrow. The movement of the new life assumes the shape of trade. Its starting-point is five and two, its goal ten and four. Between, is wide room for shipwreck. There are graves enough for patience, faithfulness, heroism. But these new talents are rife with onward instincts, such as heave out the lily's bell. The dowry is life and spirit, childhood crying for its manhood. It is spirit moving mind to heavenly merchandise. The merchants begin with borrowed capital. They neither add counterfeit coin, nor subtract from the sum of the true. They keep pure the divine currency and set in play all their entrusted powers. The spirit moves all, but all that moves is not spirit. A spurious coin inserted here will work out deadly issues. The Church in early times wed her talents with metal from Plato's mint, and Plato still comes out in the result. The Church of Christ can neither dispense with real nor permit spurious gifts. The Christian altar needs no borrowed fires. Romanism adds, Socinianism takes away: the one is smitten by death, the other by darkness; one is a fossil, the other a fanatic.

The life and grace of the ascended Lord must ever constitute the working capital of the Church. Men and Churches are strong or weak as they preserve unmixed and pure the heavenly talents. The power conferred by Christ is the only power. The coin

issued from the divine mint is current for all time, unlike the Decian medal of the Ephesian youths. The dowry of the early Church is precious metal, defiant of the furnace, paying no tribute to time. The fire that burnt on the brow of early Christianity maintains its immortality of energy. The parable resolutely asserts that the revenue of the Churches is drawn from Christ ; and that the Church is alone endowed when Christ endows her. These talents bear not Cæsar's image ; they are conferred by no earthly sovereign or statesman ; they are drawn from no national treasury. Here is the tap-root of Christian strength, personal or associated. When the Church has Pentecost, the world stirs with spiritual trade. He kills a poet who makes him rich, who chokes the springs of harmony with the lust of gold ; and that is death to Christianity which turns it away from seeking inspiration and motive power in Christ. Reasoning from a Church's worldly revenues to its strength, is like contending that a dead man can write an epic because his brain weighs so many ounces. Would it not be well for Christianity to ask what these talents mean, to sink for the springs of ancient power, and drink once again the spirit that moved the first age to sacrifice and blood ?

Even those who maintain that to be strong, Christianity must be nursed by kings and queens,

must admit that her early years display an unparalleled force and heroism. That was the age of movement, rapid, inspired, victorious. In the times of Paul and John the Churches possessed no temples, no priestly palaces, no glebes, no gift from the crown,—exacted no tithes, accepted no patronage; but they were rent by no unclean spirit of Mammon and gnawed by no Ritualistic cancer. They carried their fire to Greece, Galatia, Sardis and Rome. On the tide of their enthusiasm they swept away institutes of error and thrones of tyranny. They did what Churches are still demonstrating as impossible—they stood alone. If they had neither silver nor gold, they were rich in the energies of a living spirit; if they rode not in chariots, they sat on thrones guiding the destinies of Israel. They had no need of the sword, and no fear of it. The new Jerusalem was impregnable and glorious, because it descended from God out of heaven.

The heroic chapters of the Christian annals are those in which emperors and parliaments are on one side and the disciples of Jesus on the other; when the only endowment is a chariot of fire, the only patronage a jail, and the only promotion a stake. The Puritan period of England is a page of Milton's "Paradise Lost:" the succeeding periods have been fertile in uninspired prose. In what

ages and on what anvil have "evidences" and "apologies" been shaped? Was it when the Church bore in her body the marks of the Lord Jesus and moved fire-crowned, against the vices of the world? Was it when she fell back on Christ alone for revenue and Pentecost? We may say generally of ages and churches, that they had lost the inward evidence before they created the outward.

The divine talents embody all that is requisite for the Church's strength, guidance and aggression. They are the fire of love, the light of wisdom, the sinew of fortitude, the spirit of martyrdom, the power of faith; they comprise the energy of hope, the inspiration of the Spirit, the gale and flame of Pentecost. They are, in the first place, all that is peculiar to Christianity as an economy of grace and spirit. They are not natural powers or mental capacities, for they presuppose these capacities and are graduated into them. And yet the word talent has become a synonym for intellectual endowment. Deeply as the parable has struck its roots into our thought and literature, its true spiritual conception has been lost. Anyone rich in resources of mind, we speak of as a man of talent, without any thought of his spiritual relationships. In this sense Voltaire and Hume received the talents. But in such cases we do not think of endowment coming after and determined by ability, but of ability itself. It is

right to regard all mental faculty and soul capacity as having their origin in God, and therefore as constituting a great and solemn trust—a bequest of being. It may even be legitimate to broaden down the sense of the parable so as to embrace the attributes and natural gifts which constitute us men; but we must remember that this is not our Lord's meaning, and this process carried too far, will shift the parable from its basis, and exclude the great doctrine that man's true wealth is spiritual, not mental; and that that wealth is not an outcome of mind but the gift of Christ. The talents then are Christian, spiritual—a currency of grace, struck in Gethsemane and Calvary.

This is their primary meaning. But as spirit implies soul, and soul body; and as all three imply conditions necessary to life, and active theatre on which to move, so the talents bring with them as part of themselves, conditions of place, occasion, use, growth; they bring with them new relations to God and to the human race; they create for us our position in the Church, as pastors, deacons, or private members. They are related to time, opportunity, influence; to room for service, events, means, living occasion. They involve the exchange, commerce, field for increase.

The servants represent leaders and teachers in the kingdom of Christ, and in a wider sense, the

active aspect of Christianity. We here perceive the qualification of the true prophet. What constitutes his commission? The approval of a patron, baptism, ordination, the Holy Ghost at the hands of a brother mortal, a misguided enthusiasm? He went who received the talents ; they were his commission. Baptism is sacred ; ordination bears an apostolic seal; enthusiasm is always noble; but you may have a baptized heathen, an ordained Judas, an enthusiastic Jesuit. The first great requisite of the Christian ministry is baptism with the Holy Ghost and with fire. That there are grades of power and degrees of gift in the parable, is natural and necessary. Humanity is ever redeemed in its own likeness. If Christ is to be Christ to the world, the Twelve must be men of vastly differing capacity. They must represent the ascending scale of humanity, inasmuch as they are channels for the manward flow of the Divine thought. Some must give to posterity nothing but their name. Even within the Evangelists, we rise from one to five as on a slanting stair of mind. The Twelve sweep upwards through all degrees of gift and sentiment. They are the keys at Messiah's girdle ; they open and interpret the several types of humanity.

So must it be with all teachers. The race, to be saved, must be endowed in its representatives. Viewed in a social, educational, or mental aspect,

men broadly divide themselves into three great classes—lower, middle, and upper; ignorant, educated, and learned; unintelligent, intelligent, and intellectual. Now it is evident that there must be teachers of corresponding gifts and grades of power. There must be a descent from five to one. It is men with one idea that save men of one idea. Paucity of ministerial talent does not exclude divine sanction. Let us frankly admit and wisely adjust mental degrees in the Churches. The Master had a field for each of his servants. Is a Church near the truth, that ignores either the five talents or the one? Can any Church have a future, that cannot adjust type to type; that does not seek unity at the point of difference, namely in gift and grace?

The gifts originate movement on a new line and towards a fresh issue. Others may dream, the Christian lives and moves. Christ's doctrine goes through the world an eternal word, a *logos* waiting to incarnate itself in human lives. It is nothing if not in men's hearts; there, it is the power of God and moves the spirit's merchandise. It runs into practice and daily life, for it itself is life. It was embodied, therefore it can be embodied. Whatever Christ commanded, He was; what He condemned, He was not: His doctrine was the language of His inner life, His doctrine can be translated into outward life.

As His doctrine and person are inseparable, so are the divine life and its expression. Talents and trade are cause and effect. The new dowry touched the sleeping springs of power. A new destiny opened its gates; visions of wealth, like rivers in dreams, swept through the imagination of the servants. The enchanted isles of hope, springing from the shoreless future, drew them onward by strong constraint. They opened new negotiations, struck bargains, entered into contracts. They formed fresh acquaintances and established connection with foreign ports. Their ships laden with merchandise, spread their wings for distant shores. Their money, instead of rusting in ignoble pile, circulated from east to west—was handled by uncouth merchantmen who could not even read its inscription. They had faith to let it out of sight, to exchange it for its equivalent. To them time became talent; labour kept step with increasing wealth. Private spirit gave way to public. The prosperity of their country was their gain. The features of the sky, the signs of the times, the revolution of the seasons, the rise and fall of markets, the outbreak of war, the descent of the angel of peace, the approach of mildew and famine, the advent of plenty—were all scanned and studied by the wakeful eye of the merchants.

Nor did they alone act. Commerce is a machine of which the mainspring is capital. Whoever sets

gold into circulation agitates a thousand wheels. The merchant signifies the ship-builder, the sailor, the miner, the farmer, the day-labourer, the weaver, the clerk, the porter. The river of commerce can flow through no private territory. On its banks spring up mills and foundries; the swarming populations, the corporations of toil and thrift gather by its flow; the sinewy arms of labour beat time to its roar. If that river be frozen for but a month, society is revolutionized. The light fades in a million eyes, the fire goes out on a million hearths. The ships sleep in the harbour with folded wing; the plough rusts in the furrow; banks and warehouses are shut; engines and anvils hold unhallowed Sabbath; hard hands wipe tears from sunken eyes; hunger lies down in its lair to feed on its own vitals.

This is the commerce of the world. Christianity has also a commerce. He who has been quickened and inspired by the Holy Ghost, becomes in turn a quickening spirit. He is under the sceptre and power of the world to come. Having received, he is constrained to give. He sets into play innumerable and omnipotent forces. He is a will-power, and the economy of God is a nervous system; along the electric chords of that system he thrills his influence. The waves he agitates murmur around the throne of God.

Take an instance. What results hang around Paul's conversion! What lines of power and influence radiate from that single fact! The talents then set in circulation are the riches of the Gentiles. What priceless treasures the Apostle brought forth from his great heart! The mintage of his spirit has for well nigh nineteen centuries been the current coin of the Christian realm. His prayers go on rousing and consoling human hearts. His tears confound shallow indifference and burn remorse into the heart of scorn. The river of his experience enriches and waters the kingdom of God. Error, with prophetic ear, yet quakes at the clank of his chain. When he reasons of temperance and judgment, vice trembles on its throne. He has marshalled, trained and led the Christian armies. He moves on with time, preaching, persuading, reasoning, cheering; upbraiding the indolent, commanding the resolute and brave.

There is no apter example of the Christian spirit and the Christian teacher. Before conversion he is a Jew; after, he belongs to humanity—bearing like his Master, the leprous world in the arms of his healing sympathy. Before, he was fired with sectarian prejudice; after, he burns with a wide, absorbing enthusiasm. He addresses himself to a practical task; he calculates his resources and works accordingly. He possesses the wisdom, the

caution, the economy, the perseverance, the keen sagacity of commerce.

This is spirit-commerce—Christ's power to move men out of the flesh into the spirit, out of slavery into freedom. What teacher or prophet ever conferred talents so ripe with result and futurity? Did Greek philosophy so take shape in the lives of men? Did such spheres of flame spring from the anvil of Plato? Were his speculations so linked with action? No. To the masses they are unintelligible, and even when understood, they may slumber in the intellect without inspiring the heart. Their entrance brings little light and less life. But Christ's teaching is at once profound and clear; it is a spring the bottom of which none can see, but of whose waters all may drink. Christ claims what no teacher ever claimed—to be formed in the heart. He can accomplish what no teacher ever accomplished—He can impart His nature and inspire with His Spirit. The talents He bestows are tangible and possess a practical value. Gold is a universal language, intelligible to all nations. There is hardly a man on earth to whose mind it does not appeal, and whose condition it cannot alter. So the talents are a universal currency, carrying their own explanation, creating change, mighty to enrich, knowing no barrier but want of receptive faculty, universal in their adaptation.

Moses circulates but with Hebrew blood ; heathen philosophy never gained general currency in a race, a state, or even a town. The talents, the truths, the life which Christ imparts are for the world. The Christian has humanity as the field of his activity. The articles of his faith, the attributes of his character, commend themselves even to a fallen conscience, as flowers speak to the instinct of beauty. His character is a medal bearing the Divine image ; an epistle replete with God's thought. Who cannot feel the force of enthusiasm, the nobility of unselfishness, the power of love ? Who perceives not the beauty of holiness, or the grandeur of faith ? Are not the Christian virtues on the plane of common life ? Each becomes a coin enriching the owner and society. Thus every Christian is so much capital added to the soul's currency ; from the very laws of his life, passing into the poverty and want of others. As parent, minister, or friend he longs to impart some spiritual gift ; and like his Master, enrich men by assuming their ruined lot. "I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh."

In the Christian, innumerable lines of trade converge. He holds commerce with heaven ; he gives weakness for power, sin for holiness, breath of prayer for inspiration of spirit. He is no more a

private citizen. His prayers, hopes and yearnings travel to the ends of the earth. His faith works for itself armour out of disaster. A witness, can he be dumb? Enlightened, can he but shine? Co-heiritor of desert, Gethsemane and Golgotha, can he sleep out the watches of life in the midst of a perishing race? If rich, shall misery knock at his gate in vain? Shall he spurn from his presence philanthropy, with a growl? Shall his silver never circulate through the gaunt fingers of suffering? Are banks and safes the only custodians of his wealth? Such baptized infidels, such consecrated dust-worshippers may creep into the Churches, but they are outside living Christianity, as their altar and their deity are outside.

If activity is the genius of Christian life, growth is its immutable law. The talents are incentives and constitute a starting capital—a nucleus of life. They lay hold on trade, on God's established order, and move onward to their full result. Their increase is regulated by fixed conditions. They can produce nothing but their kind, and that according to a certain proportion. They must be carried by a human will into contact with others. Like gold, they pass out of the owner's sight, losing themselves in the exchange of the world's want; but they come back again with interest.

The principle of commerce is the soul's law of growth, as it is the law of all growth. The life of grass, flowers, forests, is a process of exchange—soil, cloud, sun and air, pay into the treasury of the plant's life; that life returns colour, form, sweetness—drinks the hemlock cup and gives back the cup of health. In the same way, this play of interchange, this free trade, is the life of states. A kingdom rimmed with monopoly has only room to die. But all commerce of air and flower, of state with state, intensifies when it reaches man in his individual aspect. His nature is a commercial world in miniature. Body trades with mind, and mind with spirit; our life and growth depend on the proper exercise of this inward exchange. It is while the brain pays into the currency of thought that it augments its revenues. When mind gives out its wealth to the bank of spirit, it rises in the divine currency—as if silver became gold. If even brain, the lowest partner, meet with stab or death, the firm must close, the capital must remain fixed.

The spiritual life requires for its trade and growth healthy conditions of body and mind. Shut out from this commerce of being, it cannot even hold its ground. But in its trade relationship it goes outward also. It enriches itself by holding commerce with toil, sorrow, pain, tribulation, death. The divine arrangement of loss and tears, of darkness

and mystery, in which it is inserted, it converts into blood, sinew, and life. It builds up its future out of its past, its conquest out of its defeat. The factors that suck existence out of natural men, carry into it their treasures. He who has the divine talents will find talents in sacrifice, self-denial, tribulation, death. We may remark in passing, that the change involved in spiritual growth is not a change in kind, but in degree. The five talents are as divine as the ten ; they are nevertheless imperfect till they have reached their true measure.

This is not the world for crowns. It is the place where being expands, and soul-wealth increases. Yet the Christian may rest assured that even in this world, there is a sure reward of faithfulness. The life lent to the world on Christ's behalf returns with large interest. In the growth of the constituent powers of that life, there is great reward. Feeling deepens its channels, faith widens its base, peace expands its crystal flow. If the condition of spiritual trade be observed, the soul will catch new gales of inspiration. Wisdom in spending wealth and husbanding time will increase. That mystery we call life will augment its energy and capacity. The soul will grow in conscious depth, and the measure of consciousness is the gauge of life.

As the servants agree to grow they are content to differ. They were nearer a level before than

after their increase. Their progress deepens their individuality. The spirit of life unites and divides. In the first age of Christianity belief was more uniform than now. In the infancy of spiritual life, in the dawn of religious reformatory, opinion is more unanimous and character less divergent than they can be afterwards. Growth makes five ten and two four. These two men have both grown, both obeyed the laws of the new life, and yet how wide is one's horizon compared with that of the other. The one has more keys at his girdle than the other. He looks from a vastly higher range and has more inlets for the spirit. Yet whether wild daisy or garden rose, both see God. It is decay that institutes acts of uniformity, or that breaks young teeth on stale creeds. Life secures unity by variety; fashions one body out of many differing members.

V.

SPIRITUAL INERTIA.

G

MATT. XXV. 18.

BUT HE THAT HAD RECEIVED ONE (TALENT) WENT AND
DIGGED IN THE EARTH, AND HID HIS LORD'S MONEY.

V.

SPIRITUAL INERTIA.

CAPACITY to use is power to abuse. He who can trade with a talent can hide it. This man does not fail through lack of ability ; if he has only a fifth of the first servant's capacity, he has only a fifth of his obligation. He is conscious of power equal to his task ; had it been otherwise he would not have failed to urge his inability ; but he grounds his vindication on a different basis—"I was afraid."

The record of his action is a repetition of the first human biography. In both him and Adam we behold duty balanced against power ; to both success is possible—failure is open to both ; they are powers starting on their march towards the great future. Both fall. Even in the new Paradise every tree that blossoms does not bear fruit. Christ in sketching the features of His kingdom and reign, neither represents His conquest as universal, nor His grace as irresistible. He is conscious that He is set to

redeem and train powers endowed with thought and will. He therefore calculates on a certain amount of failure. He sees His grace abused, His talents in the earth and His witnesses asleep. Had He represented His kingdom as an economy free from waste, as an army of powers moving in the perfect rhythm of law, an army in which each man did his duty, He would have proved Himself less than Christ. We may well ask—Would a mere pretender to divinity admit anything that wore the colour of defeat? Would not such an admission shake the foundations of his assumed omnipotence? Labouring to establish a claim to deity, would he not endeavour to wear the laureate wreath of unbroken success? But here is a frank admission that the riches of the Redeemer's grace may be perverted from their legitimate end; may be lost to the world; may even constitute the shoal on which men will suffer shipwreck.

The digging is not a long, nor in itself an evil process; a brief hour will suffice to hide the talent. Sin asks but a short time for its work of ruin, and accomplishes that work under the guise of duty. In its active aspect sin is the misapplication of power. To his neighbours the slothful servant may appear an honest worker. The motive determines the quality of the action. Digging to plant or to discover, he would have been a benefactor; digging

to hide, he is a criminal. He may have evaded human inspection, and buried his trust under cloud of night—for those who are afraid of God have little faith in man. Then, none but his fellow-servants knew whether he had been endowed or not : but heaven set a mark over the talent's grave; myriads of angels witnessed the interment; conscience registered the spot ; memory vowed never to forget.

The mere waste of time and labour may appear of small account ; viewed soberly, it will assume the grim significance of perverted power and unblest exertion. Under the image of hiding a talent our Lord sets forth the idea of a wasted life—of a life which seizes circumstance to pervert its divine resources.

1. The servant abuses power. Having ability to receive the talent, he has power to double it. But capacity of traffic, genius for commerce, ability to increase, he employs to hide. In the case of the faithful servants, we see power attuned to duty, man moving in harmony with his higher self and with divine requirement. There we have the curse disannulled and heavenly order established. The Redeemer's prayer, "Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven," has passed into the moods of human life. The two servants constitute the true kingdom of God. Their presence attests the Saviour's triumph and the energy of His grace ; for

that must be an almighty power which can establish a kingdom of law, harmony and holy obedience amid a clashing wreck of anarchy, revolt, and perverted power.

Here we witness the melancholy spectacle of power breaking loose from its chartered orbit, of energy moving counter to interest, command and obligation; with a twofold example of faithful effort before his eyes, with no example of dishonest sloth, with the suggestions of duty in his heart, and the remonstrances of conscience before the bar of reason, this man goes to dig, to hide, to wrong himself and defraud the race.

It requires talent to hide talent; endowment to pervert endowment; a partaker of the divine nature to quench the divine life. All the powers which constitute and distinguish man are impressed into this unhallowed service. The eye that looks out on God is here exercised—"Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man." Reason is set in play—"I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth." The soul's prophecy of immortality is not absent. Why this dread if there be no future, no return, no reckoning? Then judgment and prudence must decide the time, place and manner in which the talent shall be hid; after which the will telegraphs its commands to the physical powers, and the whole man arises into motion; the grave

is shaped, the talent covered and the wounded soil smoothed and healed.

The digger returns from his labour, but not as he went; he has parted with his talent, and with more than his talent—he is poorer, baser, than before he received the trust. The carnal nature has buried the divine; the true riches are left in the society of darkness and dust. Who shall give breath to dead time and occasion? Who shall repair the violated charter of conscience, or heal the shock of perverted faculty? Who shall readjust the inverted order of God? Conscience, where is now thy trumpet? Hast thou lost thy flaming lance? Is echo dead within thy cells? Have all the burning spheres of thought ceased to move? In this Ramah is there no Rachel? How profound the surrounding calm! Heaven looks down serene as a pure conscience set with springs of light. No breath of remonstrance is raised; flower and star seem to acquiesce. This unwrinkled calm oppresses me. Angels of fever, of paralysis, why do not you interpose? Are the laws of the world so fixed in their channels that none can turn aside this dreadful issue? Is God's stillness acquiescence? Is this grave sketched in the divine decree? No. This is no work of God. Our Father has wed together soul and living brain; He has opened in the mind the spring of spirit. But this is spirit buried in dead, unorganized earth, in

a grave of wreck and passion. Neither are the heavenly voices still. The conscience, like a thunder-tent, quakes with divine words : Moses and Christ are there. Retrace thy steps, O man ! Lay open the earth; reclaim thy talent; change thy decision, and win the approval of reason, of conscience and of God. Let not the turf knit together; every blade of grass that grows over thy hidden, perverted treasure will mock thy folly and curse thy delay. Undo thy wickedness, or memory may forget the spot, thy hand may lose its power, the husband-man may turn up thy talent, the earthquake may swallow it, the human race may be impoverished by its loss. But home he goes without his dowry : for he who has digged to hide rarely digs to restore. When a man is his own grave there is little hope of resurrection.

Had an irrational creature trampled the money into the earth, none would have condemned ; or had the throes of an earthquake buried it, none would have censured the earthquake. But the delinquent is a man, a member of the Christian Church, a teacher of Christianity. Stand at this angle, and see how man rises above nature and necessity, and comes under another law. Is he a blind force? an eyeless life? Is he on a level with gravitation ? Does gravitation of its own accord suspend its functions, to dig breaches in the

settled order of God? Has gravitation a conscience? Does animal organization involve moral ideas, obligation, conscience? Can heat or the actions of brute creatures fret the calm of the Divine purpose? It is man, whose heart-strings are in the infinite, whose actions alter the relations of two worlds.

When we say that a man hid the talent, you perceive the divinity of the powers abused. He whose life is a morning hour, buries that hour alive —a rational being is irrational. Man, who stretches into the future, defies the future; man, who digs to found, to sow, to discover, digged to bury. A Christian, whose life is related and social, breaks off from the communion and example of his brethren; a Christian, whose life is growth, and whose increase is to spend and be spent, turns conservative, trusts the earth before his species, buries the bare principal of the past, rather than receive interest from the exchange of the present.

Consider the noble energies employed in this work. Are the brain, reason, will, judgment, hands and feet carrying out their Maker's law? Are they not perverted, degraded, turned against God? Yet such powers men daily impress into the service of sin; and where a Christian has forsaken his fealty, there is still a broader, intenser waste of faculty. What is commoner than a man who, having re-

ceived and stifled the quickening Spirit, pays out his very being in efforts to cool the heat of conscience ? You must *dig* to hide your talent. It costs labour to keep a conscience once enlightened in its grave ; an instructed reason flings off its coffin lid. The residue of the divine life in your soul arises in its grave-clothes to rebuke you. Memory is not easily interred. Those who have been gifted but who are digging the grave of their new life, find it hard to gag conscience, to palm sophisms on their better reason. Even sloth must dig ; there is the activity of inactivity—as if the evil soul were a sea shaken by eternal storm, defiling itself by its very motion. What struggle so hot as that of the man who, opening out on God and light by many avenues, is under the necessity of fighting God on the threshold of every inlet. If in an unguarded hour God and truth steal in, how he is rent with pain ! If amid the press of other recollections, his fresh, dewy childhood enter his broken, ruined manhood, he must throw a thicker stratum of earth over that unwelcome memory. Ah, the young, angel voice of a man's earliest self sounds painfully among his ruins ! The springs by which light and truth entered must be choked with earth, and that eye of flame looking through the conscience must be veiled. Life with the half of men is a digging process. Sensibility, fear, con-

science, capacity—all the institutes of the higher nature are thrown beneath the strong-ribbed strata of pleasure, custom, passion, indulgence, sloth. To live, with many, is to sink in the lower life, shafts of oblivion for the higher. The excuses, the spiritual casuistry of many Christians are merely the effort to hide the talent. If we want scope to bury our higher self, we cultivate taste, imagination, study, society, gratification, objective life. Men drink of change, art, business, wine, till, intoxicated, they lose sight of their divinity and angelhood. Talents are not buried by a simple decree of the will. As we have seen, other factors must play their part. It is by effort after effort that the spiritual is subjected to the carnal. But room comes with effort; we have enough of earth to extinguish spirit.

Unnatural labour ! one part of a man presiding at the funeral of the other. Unblest exertion ! The labourer receives wages. The spade and plough of the farmer are followed by the yellow opulence of harvest. He who entrusts the earth with seed is rewarded with full barns. But this digging is succeeded by no reaping. No tree or flower rewards the toil. It is so much energy wasted ; like the hand of the suicide, it is power destroying power, life extinguishing life.

2. The servant perverts spiritual talent through surrounding it with false relationships. As digging

to hide was not his lawful work, neither was earth the legitimate keeper of his treasure. The talent is in the wrong place. Dust is an indifferent bank. Nor is the money more wrested from its lawful end than the soil that covers it. God puts mind between matter and spirit; man alters the relationship. The earth preserves in her archives the traditions of her revolutions. In her mines sleep the sinews of battle, of husbandry and of commerce. The incipient sword and ploughshare repose together. There are gold for the mint, and coal for the world's navies. Healing minerals innumerable lie in their ancient laboratory. By earth, man is ringed with restraint and invested with universal franchise. She affords him birth, medium of being, instrument of thought, material for fresh creations and incarnations—for what is matter but a body in which human thought is ever becoming incarnate? Earth is our tool-house, language, life-chalice. Man is muse, earth holds the types of thought; we borrow from her our physical architecture, and in return bequeath to her its ruins; we commit to her keeping unlovely death and undeveloped life; we entrust her with roots, and she presents us with flowers. What we plant we expect to see again, adorned with the beauties of resurrection. But the soil was not made to cover minted silver and gold, to conceal whole or part of the world's revenue.

The talent in the earth is a talent lost. Had the three servants unanimously consented to hide their lord's money, where would have been the Church's strength, light, conquest? Who will say that the faithful servants did not feel the shock of their comrade's wickedness? Was not the harmony of the Kingdom broken? Did not the general fund of power suffer loss? Had the three moved together the economy would have been complete. But this man is a wheel turning the wrong way, a power in diabolical revolt. Is not his example a stumbling-stone to faithfulness? As regards the general welfare his talent is lost; say two talents are lost—the gift and the gain, the principal and its interest.

This currency was designed to circulate—not to sleep, to wear down in the hands of thrift—not to contract an ignoble mail of rust. It ought to have given a mightier impulse to soul-commerce, to have fired the heart and nerved the arm of industry. This hidden treasure accounts for spiritual hunger in a thousand homes. It has given rise to incalculable destitution; the armies of Christendom are paralyzed for want of it; the universal Church feels the loss. The harmony and equilibrium of the Christian community is disturbed; a world has dropped out of the spiritual system.

Consider the criminal incongruity of making the earth your banker; of sowing the soil with minted

coin. Commit to the grave pride, animosity, sloth, self-worship, corruption, sin, death; give to dust the fetters that galled human minds, the tyrannies that crushed human hearts, the burdens that oppressed religious sympathies, the intolerance that murdered men in the name of truth; bury in the abyss of indignation polite iniquity, canonized lies, odious hypocrisy, green-eyed infidelity; throw down the gullet of death whatever eats out capacity, or enervates the inner life; but beware of hiding the smallest coin of the spiritual realm—of burying any power that could be exerted for the welfare of the race. When soul-talent becomes inoperative, the rust of retribution assails it, the world encrusts it over, it ceases to be. When it is perverted, so is the medium by which it is perverted. Earth, designed to minister to man, here becomes the jailer of divine capacity. Thus man ever employs the material to ruin the spiritual.

The talent and the earth, these two factors constitute the antagonism of human history. Their shifting alternation of relationship is the battle of the world's life. The talent in the earth signifies the dark hour or age of the human soul; restored to light, it is the age of faith and spiritual movement. The strife of the two principles for ascendancy, although spreading over the race, deepens in Christian societies, and musters all its energies on

the field of the individual Christian life. Christ leads us to the individual view-point—where the conflict of matter and spirit becomes more defined. The material does not vary much with individuality—the spiritual does. As far as matter goes, the servants are on an equality; but the spiritual or resisting element varies with the individual. Failure enters at the point of least spiritual resistance.

Matter plays a mighty part in the destiny of man. An apple throws out of line the chariot of history. Earth and spirit are the poles of our human state. It may be that the initial stages of being in all worlds are girt with the conditions of matter; that all created minds thus awake to consciousness and thought. It seems that finite spirit can only behold when veiled, that it is only when looking out of the tent door of body, that it can see God. Whether our earth was the training-school of angelhood or not, we may reasonably think that angelic life began under conditions similar to our own—that spirit through matter crept up to Spirit. There may be created beings, unembodied and purely intellectual, but it is questionable whether such beings are capable of sin or virtue, whether they are even conscious. It is certain theirs must be a colourless life, incapable alike of pain or pleasure, and thus deprived of incentive, motive, power, and of the great factors that smite into shape moral

character. It is only when linked with a corporeal nature that created spirit can descend into the depths of joy or suffering, or elaborate the attributes of character. Finite mind must be girt with its worlds of physical faculties, before it can enter the condition of probation, or originate a line of moral and intellectual action.

Body exists for spirit ; and therefore the jargon about the body being a jail, a hemming wall between the soul and light, goes for nothing. In body the soul awakes and falls, is redeemed and glorified. We cannot too strongly resist the tendency to regard matter as the enemy of mind and spirit. In the parable, matter and spirit occupy their true relationships. The evil principle is in the man, and not in the earth, which is simply passive, and cannot swallow the talent. Matter designed as the theatre and instrument of spirit, becomes its grave only through the spirit's consent. Yet this is the point alike of probation and redemption. Body opens out avenues to defection, and affords medium of salvation. A being unembodied and purely intellectual has fewer facilities for sin. If an abyss lies between him and established virtue, he has not to cross it on a hair. He is moated round with no trench of passion : he is not set to guard the passes of two natures. There is no turret-stair of sense on which the serpent may

climb into spirit. Now were we assured that angels are unembodied beings, we might perhaps see why Christ takes not on Him the nature of angels ; why no redemption has been provided or could be provided for the angelic family. Among the ruins of carnal man there still lingers the spiritual germ ; the sense of want is a divine reminiscence ; the soul is not utterly evil. The heart, like Athens, has its Socrates. But suppose a purely intellectual being falls, he must fall in his whole nature ; the citadel is not lost through the weakness of the outworks. The evil is radical, total. The being then takes the same plane with him who sins against the Holy Ghost ; for in his spirit he sins against the Spirit. Hence in the eye of Scripture, the lost angels are absolutely evil. Satan gathers up and combines in himself all subtlety, darkness, lying, hatred, revenge : he stands for the very principle of evil, responsible for all wrong, creating a universe of anarchy and revolt, poisoning the springs of life and history. There is ground for believing that the evil angels are not passed by on any principle of elective caprice, but on the ground of their utterly evil lot.

Moreover, if they are simply intellectual beings, it is hard to see how their nature could have been assumed in any other way than by taking their moral character. A redeemer could only have been

like them, when reduced to the same level of evil. Their substitute could undergo no infliction of pain and suffering from without. There could be no suffering unless as it had its roots within. But redemption means a sinless sufferer, and though salvation such as the Christian, could be provided for beings unembodied and intellectual, there still lacks the *nexus* along which redeeming power moves. There is no court before which suffering love can plead. The character is to be recast, but where are the fires to soften and the hammers to smite out new form and feature? On good ground we may doubt whether spirit can act on spirit in a regenerative way. It is in the alembic of body that man arises new created. The farther therefore we are removed from the form and condition in which Christ wrought out redemption, we in proportion become remote from the possibility of redemptive change. Christ did not assume a spiritual body but a natural: when we therefore put off the natural we fall out of the conditions of redemption; not that Divine love and patience are exhausted, but that medium and instrumentality are removed; and thus the call to repentance in this life deepens into unfathomed urgency; salvation and probation do not stop at an arbitrary line, but at the brink of a profound eternal necessity. It is here that we learn to look on purgatorial fires

and after-death cleansings, as nothing more than the chimeras of a diseased theology.

The sensuous and ascetic meet ; both split on matter. Simon and his pillar, the servant and his spade, work out the same practical result. Gethsemane and Golgotha are impossible to both. The spirit that sneaks up its ascetic pillar, or burrows within monastic walls, that shirks the pass of sacrifice and shuns the social leprosy, has sat for its portrait. How much is he worth, who to preserve himself from taint, must like the Siberian mammoth encase himself in ice ?

3. The servant treated as his own what belonged to another. "Hid his lord's money"—a common line of action. Men act as units and not as related powers, assuming that they are free to shape a private course. This man consulted his own oracle : he failed to realise that he was a wheel in the corporate machine. So still. Men forget that their line of conduct ends not with themselves. "Have we not a right to be religious or the opposite ? Are we not free to believe all things or nothing, the Bible or the Koran ? If a man have gifts, are they not his own ? Are the fortunes of my talent your concern ? What claim has the Church on me ? I steer an independent course, I prefer to be an unattached Christian. Shall not the rose be free to close around its balm ?" But the

Church and world *have* a claim upon you. Does not God count your talents part of the Church's capital? Isolating yourself you commit a double wrong; first against yourself, and then against humanity. Gifts are relative, as the members of the body are relative; our very individualities relate us all the more closely to our brethren; for we are built into a life-wall of rubble-work. Even greatness and genius are not lifted up out of humanity, but more deeply inserted into it: more profoundly and intensely human; the fivefold nature is no more than the one multiplied.

He is a wise man who finds out that he is a line in God's draft of things; that though but a line drop out of the world's Iliad it leaves a chasm behind. All true lives flow manward, and chafe within their shores till they fall into the sad depths of human want and sorrow. He alone lives who passes as a power into the lives of other men—who is content to circulate beneath the rind of the world's life. When men move to the music of a new life, "no man liveth to himself." Blessed is he who is not his own; who knows that sacrifice is the world's corner stone, and that in life's holiest place there is an altar; who feels that even *he* is sacred, that his life is already hid with Christ in God.

Even from the bottom of the trench this talent gleams with divine radiance. Is it stamped with

mortal image? Does it issue from earthly mint? If lost could a mortal replace it? It is sufficiently unlike its surroundings; there is a somewhat wide abyss between the divine and earthy. "His Lord's money"—this talent-dowry then is related to another will; bears on its surface the right and title mark of another. It is the divine in man, God's portion in man. Is that sink good enough for your Lord's money? Is this the pre-appointed way of using any such wealth? Where is your title to bury any thought, impulse, inspiration or talent of the Infinite? It is dangerous to dig in your pleasure-heaps, fame-heaps, dust-heaps. It is death to submerge your fraction of the Divine under earth-hills of whatsoever kind. As you would answer for it when the Master returns, keep your Lord's money—that which is struck with the likeness of the eternal—above the loam of dead seasons, systems, and doctrines—above all loam and dead leafage of dead thoughts—above the dust-mountains of decomposed dogmas. It is not safe to throw formulated rubbish, creed-hillocks—Westminster or otherwise—between the Lord and His talents. These valleys of dry bones and the Lord's money have nothing in common. The skull that held the thought and life of the past, like all other skulls, must cease to be. A living age or man must be girt with a new and living form.

Is this loyalty to Heaven? May the Divine be thus disposed of? Thine own leaden, washed coinage thou mayest hide, but not the true money. Royal money, part of the divine sum total, lent on usury, committed to intelligence—thou must not compound with earth. Wert thou born to fling a white star into the abyss? Will the Divine submit to be wed with earth? The Divine in man is passive, bears its silent cross. Here is the patience of Heaven. A divine thought dies: presumption blots a line out of God's order. Were there no "Lord's money" in man, he might play out his little part in selfish isolation, but then this talent links him with awful issues and certain reckoning.

VI.

WIDENING THE TIME-HORIZON.

MATT. XXV. 19.

AFTER A LONG TIME THE LORD OF THOSE SERVANTS
COMETH, AND RECKONETH WITH THEM.

VI.

WIDENING THE TIME-HORIZON.

RADING these words, one feels tempted to ask, what was Christ's idea of what we call time? Did it present itself to Him as to men? Had He a divine conception of its flow? Did the infinite and finite ideas blend, or did the divine and human natures regard duration from their separate planes? As man, Christ was entered into time and subject to its sway; like men He had to wait for wisdom and stature, had to climb up to ripeness on the hours. Time spread itself as theatre for the development of His life: it brought the cup of infant wonder and dying passion. On the divine side, time could exercise no influence over our Lord, no more than the flow of an earthly river digs a channel on the unwrinkled field of the firmament. The divine and human in our Lord's person, however, so interpenetrate each other, so blend into unity, that they can only be separated in thought and not in fact. It may therefore be

profoundly true that Christ's thirty-three years on earth signify to Him and to us two vastly different periods. A life that has an inward Gethsemane and cross, can hardly be measured in its motion by our poor clockwork. Our days may be its ages. Those years, one, and thirty-three, are margin lines hemming in an eternity swept by moving worlds of light and gloom. The long time is measured by a human standard. We cannot conceive of Deity regarding the most protracted period as absolutely long. Still, it is equally certain that even to God, one period will appear long when compared with another period; none will seem extended when measured by the Eternal Existence. We measure time by our own little life. To us the historic epoch is really, not relatively long; we feel our existence to be a unit in the sum of duration. The sphere of time or even a section of that sphere, oppresses our imagination, for the same reason that the magnitude of earth or sun bewilders our thoughts. Our vision is in both cases confined to a point: in both cases we are creatures of what we endeavour to comprehend—part of the spheres around which we strive to throw the girth. God looks on time not from a point on its own globe: to Him it is a wasting pebble chafing in the infinite ocean-depths.

We must not assume that Christ here echoes the

expectation and prejudice of His disciples. "The whole connection," according to Olshausen, "requires the assumption that a return at the time of the Apostles is spoken of, so that the words *μετὰ χρόνον πολὺν* primarily refer to the *expectation* of the Apostles." But this takes for granted that the disciples clearly comprehended the Redeemer's death and resurrection, whereas it is clear that they "knew not as yet that He should rise from the dead." If they expected not a resurrection, it is hard to see how they looked for their Master's return. It may be said, however, that Christ anticipates the longing for His appearing which afterwards seized the heart of the young Christian brotherhood. We find the hope of an immediate return breaking forth with a kind of crocus-bloom, surrounded by wintry enough soil and sky; like the crocus asking, Is it not time for higher birth? time to give out to light the apocalypse of one's being? to drink with fully opened eye the azure depths? No, sweet anachronism, it is not summer yet: the world yet sleeps in her ice-mail and thou art but her dream. This longing has its roots in ignorance, and must be abandoned as error. Paul must learn at last to speak of departing to be with Christ. Moreover, the spirit and genius of the parable forbid such an interpretation. Christ's aim is to sketch with a few living strokes the heavenly

kingdom as it exists in the plan and counsel of God—not as it appears to the eye of morbid sentiment. Had Christ given voice to the expectation of His disciples, He would have represented the time as *short*: for how could that be a long period which grown-up men saw begin and expected to see close?

The long time, then, is not an accommodation to a holy delusion; the parable is not a lie in divine garniture. On the contrary, Christ sweeps away the baseless hope of a sudden glory-tide, and broadly asserts that the interval between His ascension and return will cover a vast field of time. The word "long" digs up by the roots any prospect of seeing the Lord revealed during their own time, which the disciples may have cherished. The period of absence is long not merely with reference to human calculation, but in relation to all preceding historic epochs. The ground-plan of the new world is on a vast scale; within the compass of this *chronon polun* there is room for many world-births.

The belief that man is only five days younger than the universe, has exercised a disastrous influence by narrowing our conception of time. This influence extends to our ideas of the eternal; for the outer ring of the known is the inner ring of the unknown. If we find that the universe sprang into

existence only a few thousand years ago, we stand in the heart of eternity with a dark lantern in our hand ; we have no fire-globe pushing out the circles of gloom and letting light fall into the eternal depths. Then are we but ants burrowing in the dark, in this time-crack, between the conflux of two infinities. Peeping out of this crack, how much of the upper or under depths can our vision sweep ? It is but a small seed-barn to sow the infinite. From such matrix can we expect any great births ? Can any great fleet freighted with thought and merchandise of heaven sail into this creek ? Is there no Hercules to heave out the sides of this ant-cranny, to make it a wide-ringed abyss drinking light from the upper and under worlds, and from which we may see the stars in their paths ? In our minds eternity is but the lengthened shadow of time. Hemmed in our little time-shell of half a dozen thousand years, we can have but a poor conception of the infinite. For us in such case, what depths can there be in the words “ My Father worketh hitherto ? ” Eternity had a worker in its heart, somewhat more than five days before Adam. Divine energy had an employment—shaping garment-language for its own thought. Are we to suppose that creative power kept Sabbath silence, wrapt its thought in no burning world, till a week before the time when human history began ? We

must look for the initial "work" much deeper in the infinite. If asked at what time God was inactive and unexpressed by Word and work, why then we might be compelled to say—at no time. Indeed, if time be coeval with the manifestation of creative power, it may be that, as distinguished from eternity, there is no time. We associate time with the phenomenal, and eternity with the unseen; and often picture ourselves as shut out from eternity by our mortal body and the gate of death. But the dead and disembodied are no more in eternity than we: we as well as they are girt with the spiritual, unseen, and infinite.

In whatever respect science has failed, it has succeeded in vastly widening our conceptions of duration. Into the infinite of space it has shaped a path along the burning worlds: into the duration depths it has let its plummet fall. Strike through the earth's rind, you read the epitaphs of indefinite periods. There time has buried his autobiography; he has filled his coffers with the wealth and conquests of uncounted economies; he has gathered into his caves the spoil and wreck of vast periods—great, even in their urn. Like a kind of Melchizedec, he seems without beginning of days or end of life, a priest of the Most High God blessing the birth and presiding at the grave of innumerable epochs. As Revelation wears at her girdle the

keys of the spiritual, science carries the keys of the material. It is only when science opens the gates of the universe that the majesty of God and the vastness of His world-plan begin to appear; then the voice coming up from the depths of duration and space, is like a sigh from the heart of the Infinite. Then man appears as the latest link in an indefinite chain, as coming on the scene but yesterday; unable to find any trace of his existence in the archives of the world, or to claim a single bone in the mighty charnel fields of ancient races; his footsteps nowhere unless on the surface of the planet: every coral bed or oyster shell a sarcasm on his antiquity; his sorrows, joys, and triumphs written on stone which is itself the accumulated dust of an obsolete world. Were not the temples of our antiquity, the architectural piles of Syracuse and Rome, quarried from the earth's modern rockworks?

Now if time was unable to read the record of its own years before man appeared, and if man has sojourned on our world for but a brief day, we may surely conclude that the past is no more than the rude stem out of which a wider history has to grow; that the future is the stithy on which man will hammer into outward shape and figure his inward universe of thought. It were to say the least, strange, if the life-term of the tenant melted into

insignificance compared with the period spent in building the house.

Surely man has yet a mighty part to play in the world. The everlasting Gospel demands a broader field for its seed-cast than a few thousand years. Christ has not borne the redemptive cross for a few generations only ; although He was the hope of the ages before His advent, still His cross is for the future. That He brought not His Gospel sooner is evidence at once of the breadth of His plan and of the slow growth of the race. He comes as soon as He can get a foot-hold in the world : a fissure of conscious want. The world, correctly speaking, *begins* with Him ; the foregoing ages had merely covered its iron crust with soil capable of nourishing the seeds of a new paradise. The millenniums had shed their leaves on that cursed ground before it could afford root-room to the tree of life. With Christ the talents come : He brings the germ principle of a new world. But why bring germs to a world that is crumbling into the gnawing river of time ? Why endow humanity when at the point of death ? What means the presence of a Sower, if the angels be already in the field to gather in the harvest ? Christ employs similitudes which plainly show that society begins afresh with Him. He is a seed-corn falling into the ground ; His kingdom is like leaven, slowly widening into universal em-

pire, or like a mustard seed which a man sowed in his garden. He speaks of Himself as the life, implying that before Him the human race had, properly speaking, no spiritual life. Again, He is the light of the world, opening a door out of the former night and letting in on men the morning star. From all which it is clear that the Redeemer's kingdom regards the past as mere subsoil and root field to hold in place the new order in its slow and vast growth, and that the angel psalm which the shepherds heard was not the funeral but the natal hymn of the world. At the birth of Christ it appeared to many that humanity, like an exhausted volcano, had spent the stores of its vital energy, and that the chalice of fire must henceforth be overgrown with grave-flowers. The lava streams had hardened in their bed, and the inward upheavings had subsided into a ghastly calm. Even the disciples regarded the Son of man more as the last birth of time than as the "first born among many brethren." But those who thought that human society had exhausted itself, forgot that up till the time of Christ society lacked the chief element—namely God. The water merely waited for the hour when it should be wine. Since that hour, deeper than the roots of all life, there is an Emmanuel, a God with us. When Jesus breathed on His disciples and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost,

He finished the last act of a second creation, He imparted the abiding power of an endless life. A new pulse began to beat in the human soul behind its band of fire.

It is true that Christ seemed to come late, when civilization, systems religious and political, were falling into decay. Greece with her train of arts was casting about for a quiet grave : and what had Rome more than a stomach and a sword ? This decay, however, was the death of the world without God, and the birth of the world with God. Christ is the world's grain of wheat springing out of this wreck, and gathering the disintegrated past into a new organic present. The hour when humanity lay most in wreck was the hour when its hope-star arose ; for then the spirit in its conscious want held to heaven its bankrupt hands for the Christian talents.

It was not by chance that the first promise of a Redeemer was given in Paradise ; the cross in the economy of God stands close to the gate of Eden. The two Adams meet ; the Second healing the springs of history poisoned by the first ; the Second succeeding the first in the heirship of all things. The living soul gives place to the quickening Spirit ; the Lord from heaven brings the morning dew of second youth as soon as the curse has licked up the first. If the cross seemed to men to

come late, it was because they had regard to the past; but Christ is not the God of the dead but of the living; with Him the history of man branches out of the cross, and Christendom, how thick-sighted soever in other respects, has seized the heart of this truth. Were the world to cease shortly after the advent, it would seem strange that man had been deprived up till the closing hour of his history, of the example of a perfect, conquering life. The fact that a model was afforded in the life and person of Messiah would lead to the conclusion that the human temple was not built but about to be founded; for what would be the wisdom of setting before man the ideal life, when he had given the last stroke to the poor actual life? But as the race began with the first Adam, and as Moses connects the appearance of man with the creation of the world, so Christ founds the human family afresh, and the history of His appearing is the spiritual genesis of the race. Now there is a true human vine with roots and life-currents, and the branches are grafted into the fulness of vicarious life.

Prophets of decay are ever predicting the near approach of dissolution—what they call the close of the dispensation. Whenever theology becomes a hollow leafless tree-stump, it is filled with the hootings of these unclean night owls. To them

every cloud is a final eclipse, and their own straw pipe is the archangel's trumpet. "End of all things," "final consummation," "immediate appearing," and such like, are the well-thrummed strings of these blind harpers. Surely the time is past for portioning out God's economy as a trim Dutch garden, into its little square beds, with their borders of chronology. But given bat's eyes and a hollow tree for universe, one cannot expect much in the way of prophetic vision. Surely it is not hard to see that man is only in his infancy. The furrows of the world are sown thick with germs that have scarcely struck out in bud: hitherto these germs have kept waiting for soil to cover them. The furrows are veined with latent roots which shall seek the light in their time. Eighteen centuries have passed and Christ the divine wheatcorn is still in great measure lying above ground, awaiting the time when He shall sink into the world's heart. Each century enacts to its children the story of the khan. In how many nations has Christ found room to be born? How many institutions, churches, hearts, can entertain the divine Child, much less the divine Man? Has Christ found room in literature, art, science, government? He waits outside His temple for the uplifting of the everlasting doors. Has His doctrine had time to sink to the roots of

human society ? Have His parables yet rent their shell ? Has the world broken its spikenard box to anoint His head ? Does the world understand the Christian Church, or the Christian Church, Christianity ?

Man had lost the keys of his Father's house more correctly, they were withheld till he became of age. In a dark and deep sense the son of earth has hitherto been a stranger on the earth ; and in answer to his cry of agony, God is revealing His laws to him in even a fuller sense than he dreamed. This dim haunted house of life has new light streaming through its bars ; from man the child of mystery—the universe of swart depths—the shadows flee away. The last generation has broken more seals than the first thousand years. The early ages did little but ask, “Who is worthy to open the seals of this book ?” Wherever in the world the inquirer went he but made it darker with his own shadow ; he himself was the supreme enigma—a vocal, thinking mystery, an eclipsed world moving on its axis without knowing why. Pythagoras might render into a living tongue the classics of the rocks—Hipparchus might dimly catch the rhythm of the stars ; but there lay human life—dark, moaning, troubled, overwhelming every philosophic craft that ventured to let down a line into its depths. After toiling all day

in the field of the world, the thinker returned to himself and to night; returned to find awaiting him in his inner sanctuary the eternal mystery. These voices, contradictions, tide-attractions—this inward presence ever changing into shapes of demon, brute, and God—what of them? What solution can there be when we have lost the keys of the mysteries? When we mistake a wreck for a system? If man is viewed as a thing, not as a power, as possessor of a single and not a dual nature, as playing the whole instead of the initial acts, as moving in the leash of fate, and not among the ruins of his free will, how can he be other than a riddle? But the mysteries are becoming torch-bearers, as if the solemn pyramids wore a crown of flame, and man with his inward transfigurations carries a spiritual day-spring into the world's night. Aristotle threw man into the analytic fires that he might educe a God. Modern thought has cast the universe into the crucible, and the unknown becomes the known.

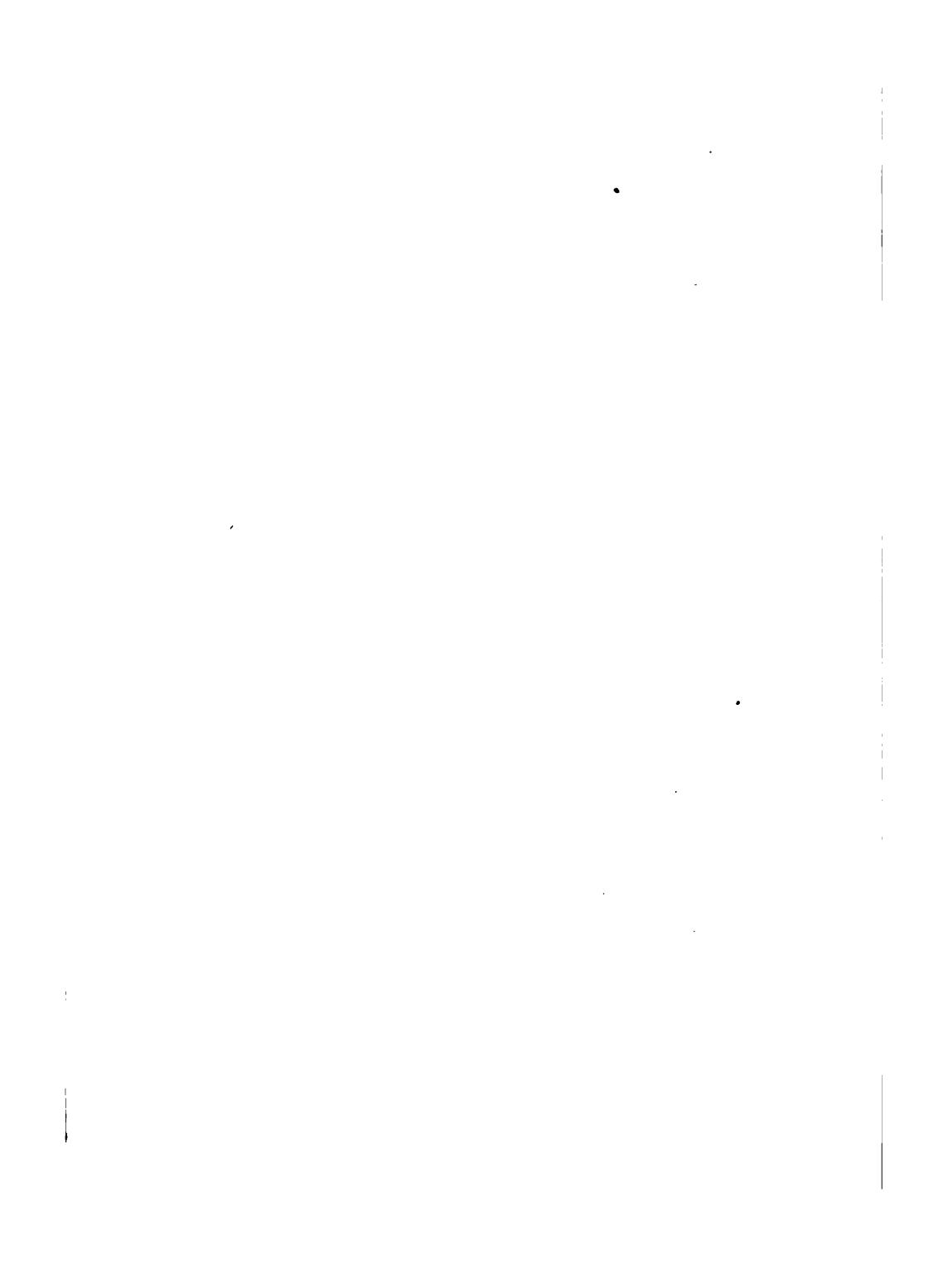
Now, if the advance of science only added to man's mental furniture, we can hardly think that God would close the school while the scholar progressed with his lesson. Every discovery in science, every wise step in philosophy has bequeathed to the race a new inheritance of power—has brought man nearer the divine ideal, the

"dominion" he had lost. But we are still begirt with mysteries, in the ground, in the heavens, in the air ; growth, decay, health, disease, have their sacred arks into which none as yet has looked. If we carry lights into the world we also fling down our shadows. Are not poverty and sorrow still abroad with latch-key ? Does not worth follow a hearse as its guiding cloud, while a thing of gilt and gizzard moves in the marriage dance ? This potter's house lies in the twilight ; but men begin to see that there *is* a Potter in His house shaping history on His wheel, working everywhere, but especially in man. Most of the mysteries that at present baffle are destined to ultimate solution. God has so hidden that when the creature seeks he is sure to find. Child of shadows, the sun creeps slowly up thine inward firmament, and thou in thy turn art a light in a dark place. The field of secrets is vast : there are rooms in the world-house and in thy soul-house, which thou hast not entered yet ; but thou hast found many a lost piece : thou art already a key-bearer—an opener. *Fiat lux,* sayest thou. Does not each year bring thee nearer the unseen heart that beats behind the scene ? Urge downward thy shaft into the living springs. Are not thy pickaxe and shovel among thy talents ? The discoveries of science are the development of the race; he who despises a star

wears it in his own firmament. If we have found the piece we are enriched; if we have not found it, still we have swept out the dust on which most men live. It is so ordained that the search after the hidden is a new revelation of the revealed. "He blessed him there," can be said of everyone who wrestles with great problems in the dark till the daybreak. Every new effort is a ring of growth thrown around our life; each new rent in the cloud lets in more of God; each fissure in the walls of gloom is a higher soul-birth.

In every past age the moral and physical economies of God have said to man, We "have many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now." Twilight plays a divine part in the world. The soul-iris must adjust itself or the added light will be even intenser darkness. "Ye cannot bear them now." Is not time itself the iris of the soul's eye, broadening its focal field that the eye-cell may drink the deepening light? The shadows still lie thick athwart our young dewy world; but as the revealing star advances the gorges clear, the thought-sailor catches through the depths glimpses of life's sullen river bed: the moving mystic stream reveals beyond, a world of settled fact. Touched by time prophecies become annals, the mysteries that hag-like lean upon our life, vanish with the soul's sleep. What is our

past but man weeping in his sleep, burning in the furnace of his own dreams? But the Awakener has been in the world: the dull, drugged sleep is broken, man awakes to find that the world is wider than his bed, that life is different from the stuff of dreams. He finds that he is environed with a world of facts, laws, activities. Is not yon the Son of man, sowing the barren flats with new seed showers? These are but the spring winds then: this world-bulb will reveal what is in it by and by. There will be breaking of shells and bud-sheaths, much castings of first leaves, changes in the way of shape and colour. The last will reproduce the first; the grain in the ear will be as the grain at the root. Adam after millenniums of blind growth to root, wood, and straggling branch, will bear an Adam on the topmost bough; when he has developed, leafed, flowered, he will bring forth his fruit—he will reproduce himself—not the unnatural but the natural and divine. Then will Christ come in the ripe, mellow light of the world's harvest time, when the human vine trained up the cross shall be heavy with fruit of holiness and light.



VII.

GOD'S ENDINGS OUR BEGINNINGS.

MATT. XXV. 20, 22.

AND SO HE THAT HAD RECEIVED FIVE TALENTS CAME
AND BROUGHT OTHER FIVE TALENTS, SAYING, LORD,
THOU DELIVEREDST UNTO ME FIVE TALENTS:
BEHOLD, I HAVE GAINED OTHER FIVE TALENTS BE-
SIDE THEM. . . . HE ALSO THAT HAD RE-
CEIVED TWO TALENTS CAME AND SAID, LORD, THOU
DELIVEREDST UNTO ME TWO TALENTS: BEHOLD, I
HAVE GAINED TWO OTHER TALENTS BESIDE THEM.

VII.

GOD'S ENDINGS OUR BEGINNINGS.

THE earlier scenes of this parable are played out on earth. This moves on a different theatre. The old world, with its cross and spiritual exchange, has drifted away. Time has given the final touch to the figure of human character and history, and thrown aside the shaping steel. All the mighty regenerative factors which hammered out lasting shapes on the world's anvil have vanished from their forge. The number of the talents must remain fixed, for trade and interest are of the past. The world's vesper hour has rung, and the morning of spirit dawned.

The accounts are rendered separately, for as there is an individuality of experience, so is there an individuality of judgment. Each servant carries with him his own world, deeply moated, clearly defined. "I" and "thou," "my" and "thy," remain ringed around with everlasting depths of separation. Death is no mightier than

sleep to fuse down the barriers that fence off life from life. Every man drains his own life-chalice, is baptized from the font of his own tears. In the house of being we have each our own mansion, where we are environed with our own individualities. Is not each life an inland sea tumbling within its girding shore? Even the lives of brothers seethe isolated in their depths. Every heart is a shekinah curtained in with its own mysteries, and accessible to the great High Priest alone. Members of the same household, children of the same God, we are and must be alone at all the most solemn junctures of our being. Whether in Gethsemane or on the sacred mount, we are surrounded as it were by sleeping men, unconscious of all that is passing in our inner life. Is not every human spirit an islet in the eternal deep? Our brethren can neither trade for us nor bear our cross. Have you never found yourself struggling to crawl out of your own past, your own life-shell, into another past? Or endeavouring to empty your coffer of spiritual dowry and obligation into another life? You may be other, not another. The servants receive and return the talents separately. They cannot unite their fortunes and stand behind the broad shield of a common possession. Your talents are the world-egg from which may spring a divine universe or a

grim, sweltering chaos ; but whether chaos or kosmos, you root your being into the world you have framed, and live in it as in a wider personality. The work becomes the worker : for we draw our past into the sap-ducts of our present, and breathe the breath of our life into all our creations. Our outward life is but a deed-cast of the life within, and our present is ever historian of our past. Thus every man develops for himself and *out* of himself, the soul-shell in which he carries the results of his life across the river of death. And so these men, revolving round the same life-axle and moving towards the same future, have beaten out their separate tracks, remaining as distinct after death as before—each girt with his own rim of individuality.

The reception and resignation of the talents inaugurated each a new epoch in the lives of the men. The one opened into wider influence, the other into deeper being. It is a solemn hour when we first awake to discover that we are divinely dowered, and to know that life and time on touching us become dross or gold. We strike deeper into reality when we become conscious that we have Christ and heavenly merchandise on board : that we are causes, originators, centres raying out in infinite lines the quality of our life. Are we not anointed ? Are not our lips purged with altar

heat? We are challenged by God, we have challenged the world.

It is a solemn moment when we bid our talents farewell; when the apostle delivers up his apostleship, the minister his ministry, and the sufferer his cross. I can conceive of a man so entirely given away to the work of Christ, that he would gladly deny himself of heaven for ten lifetimes. In Paul we have an instance of a great spirit in the agony of irresolution, in a strait between two—inwardly crossing and re-crossing the frontier of death. Such a spirit will almost drop a tear on the threshold of Paradise. Entering on his joy, he ceases to be the angel of the weary and the weeper. Can Moses cease to lead and legislate without a pang? Is it nothing to shake hands with time, to leave the plough midway in the furrow, the seed basket half full, to lay down the steel when the angel begins to awake in the marble? When we leave the world we cease to be embodied powers in it. The righteous man carries his soul wealth away with him: the servants leave none of the talents with the bank and exchange. Thoughts, labours, memory, example, influence, may be left behind, and in this sense the man as a power may be increased and distributed by death; but he is no longer present as causation, as radiating light and heat. “He was a burning and

a shining light." I am not considering so much what the world loses as what the divinely gifted themselves surrender in death; although the measure of the world's loss is in a sense the measure of their sacrifice. When the Christian lays down his soul armour, when he ceases to work and suffer, when he parts with vicarious burden-bearing and leaves the cross outside the gate, he makes a great and solemn surrender. Even the removal of certain talents which hardly appear to be talents, leaves a sad blank behind: in other words, what seemed the accidents of the man were channels for the outflow of his power. How much light goes out with a living form, localizing the divine, and affording a typal speech for love! A human presence raying ardour and inspiration out, and burning into our hearts, is one of the mightiest factors that move in our life. With the flesh we lay aside instrumental power and revealing medium. There is a talent of the eye. The eye is the gate of spirit where the soul burns visibly and melts souls into holier moods. How often have our bitter outpourings of sorrow sunk into oblivion by falling into a human ear! We have felt baptized with power by the grasp of a true man's hand; and how forlorn and bankrupt have we found our heart when an inspired voice grew still! Let those name the worth of the voice talent who have

seen the holy lips of friendship locked with the seal of silence. If he would but speak ! His voice was a soul within my soul, an assurance, a revelation. Never more to stir the air of doubt with living word, never more to come out of the unseen with good tidings and bread for faith—has sometimes seemed to me a sacrifice. The soul has lost its lyre, and the music of its life has fallen into silence.

But if even the good and faithful resign their trust with hearts awed and humbled, will not the bad find the surrender bitter with remorse, when left alone with the grave of time, possibility, change, mercy, hope ? Oh, this seizure of the soul's sadly abused dowry — this surrender of rust-worn talents ! I saw the poet weep over his desecrated lyre, and the philosopher for ever quit the forge where he had hammered shields for unbelief, and the sickly weaver of diseased romance shorn of web and loom, and the sceptre of influence wrenched from the hand of potentates. I saw the angel quench the light of unhallowed genius, and bear away the arms of infidelity, and the sophist's die that smote the false with the face of truth : I saw him seize the crucible in which the historian fused down the world from its divine sequence, to cast it in the mould of fate, and he smote the cup of God-capacity and the drugged bowl of

life, and destroyed the energy that had created to destroy.

1. The faithful servants account for what they have received from their Lord.
2. They account for what they have effected for their Lord.
3. They connect their endowment and success as cause and result.

First, they render an account of what they have received: "thou deliveredst unto me five talents," and "unto me two." Mark the clear power of the soul's identifying eye. A long time has passed, eating off the features from the world, sucking heights into depths, washing down the generations into the abyss, bleaching out the colours of history, setting and resetting the world-types to express new economies of thought; but the soul eye has carried all along in its inmost cell—distinct and unimpaired—the image of its Lord. In the Judge it recognizes the talent divider: "Thou deliveredst unto me." Every great and true life has seen God, has felt at the heart of all a Person, a Master, has held out its hands to higher Being. Is not the first of all talents an eye to drink in God? to see that nature, history, and life, are but a wider burning bush? The central figure of time and eternity is the same: and the good and true are the clearest and deepest seers, inasmuch as by

taking and holding the image of the Divine they have an unsealed apocalypse of what will be. All the talents of the good and faithful are struck with the divine as with a medal stamp, and are so much of God. In these talents the Lord is ever present, and he who would see God must look into man—spiritual man—for he is the world's holy place. The faithful servant carries the “evidences” in himself. Is not his life a leaf of inspiration? Of nothing is he more conscious than of another life moving within his life; he can turn inwardly and say “Thou.” To silence the cackle of scepticism he need but look into his soul-coffer and ask, Whose image is this? Of what reign is this the currency?

The servants have felt hands reaching out of the supernatural, laying altar coals on the heart and girding with stewardship. They have caught the meaning of the deep truth that behind the seen Me there is an unseen Thou: they have seized on the true relation of the one to the other. Like Paul they are conscious of the human and divine meeting and mixing in their life, of an earthly vessel ringing round a heavenly treasure. However the two men may differ in their gifts, they are one in tracing those gifts to a source beyond themselves. They do not replace their Lord's image and superscription by their own; the talents

original and acquired bear the same die stamp. The doctrine of redemption by the grace of Christ is here clearly taught. Christ is not the reformer of a corrupt world, but the creator of a new. He has not augmented the soul's revenue, He has founded it. The past had shaped the human vessel on its wheel, had hollowed out receptive scope; Christ brought the fulness of grace and truth. None can say that the world has witnessed two Christs. One and One only has set into currency the spirit-talents. If grace, mercy, forgiveness, faith, peace, hope, joy, eternal life, are in the world, they came by Jesus Christ. Of late there has been a strong tendency to regard Christ as a reformer among reformers, as a teacher among teachers, to quote Him on the same name-file with Moses, Zoroaster, and Mohammed. To raise a temple for unbelief, Christianity is built in with the systems—a sapphire stone among Theban bricks. Let us put Christ into the pantheon if we wish to smite Him stone dead. Let us have a worship of human gods, of thinkers, sages, warriors, heroes; let Christ share this worship, on the ground that He was a great man and took the world into His soul, and gave it out reminted. Let us teach that all great men are Saviours, whether wording their gospel in the Phædo, or in steam, or in steel and cannon shot. In worshipping

gods we get rid of God. It is vain to deny; after all denial *Christ is here*: history is stronger than negation. Concede to Christ greatness, even divinity, and claim the same for Plato and Shakespeare. Show that Christ implies Mohammed and Plato Christ: that Messiah had only to lay open Phædo's brain to let Christianity out. Thus Christ falls into human range, is but the historic inference of the human premiss. The vast, abrupt proportions of the Redeemer's life slope sweetly down to other lives, which open up out of the same human level; the two sides are equalised, and then we may conclude that as yet history has seen nothing but man, and man nothing but nature. So the priests of the intellectual temple.

The servants know better the genesis of their wealth. There are not two givers: and Christendom on a profounder analysis of her spiritual being will yet frankly confess, "Thou deliveredst unto me all these talents." It is precisely as a giver that Christ stands isolated from all men. The word *give* waited empty till He freighted it with infinite meaning. Who but Himself has ever been able to use without misusing it? It is a Christ-word, often on Messiah's lips because always in His life:—"I give to them eternal life; My peace I give unto you; I will give you rest; to them gave He power; the glory which Thou gavest Me, I have

given them ; the water that I shall give him ; the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." Giving so occupies the foreground of Christ's life, that Paul with deep insight conceives his Lord's person, life and death as one unspeakable gift. As we stand looking into the life of Messiah through the door of His great maxim, "it is more blessed to give than to receive," we see an eternity of out-paying love and fulness, a river of water of life flowing into the dry channels of human life and history. The words come up like soundings out of an infinite life, bearing evident marks of having kissed the under depths of divine experience. Great men had fought, dreamed, questioned, thought, cut out steps for faith up the slants of doubt, absorbed their age and given it out again ; they had hewn passes into spirit ; to obtain its secret had burnt down the world in the kiln of thought like lime ; had digged out, washed from earth, and arranged the capacities of the soul ; had seen in them at least a service for a banquet of the gods. They had consumed human life and society that they might analyze them in their ashes; they had speculated much, had dived far into the dark, sowing it as it were with flint-sparks. But when they had done, there was nothing in man that had not proceeded from man, nothing in the world that had not been there before.

Philosophy had only feathered and taken wing.
Plato covers the Categories.

Christ reasoned little, speculated none, built no holy place for doubt, let down no sounding lines, was never out of His depth, had the truth without analysis or synthesis. I am not careful to secure His claim as a thinker. The Truth has no need to approach the truth. He who came down from heaven is *in* heaven, without any ascent on baked brick : and what is thought, but a stair which the mind builds to reach higher mind ? Nor am I concerned to show that Christ made no use of the past, for He had been there to give and was free to go there to take. If great men absorb their age and contemporaries, He exhausted the past, present, and future. He drew out of the past its spirit, meaning, truth. He took back all that was divine in Judaism. When He appears it has no longer temple, altar, holy place, prophet, priest, sacrifice, place or meaning. But no genius however comprehensive could extract from the past, life and truth, grace and holiness. In imparting these, Christ is lifted out of the company of all human greatness. He is the substance of which the deepest thought was the shadow. He is as positive as light or heat. He enters the soul as health, draws the conscience with polar power, fills capacity and desire, flows through withered man like spring currents, for He

is the resurrection and the life. John's eyes of fire see in Him reality, essence, absolute being filling the empty soul-depths to their shores with a pulsing sea. "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ, and of His fulness have all we received." As if time, weary of feeding men with shadows, took up the living Substance and set Him in their midst. When Christ comes, a soul beats in thought, the world throbs and heaves with life-energies; and the human spirit lives and buds, for behind it are the light and heat of essence. The living truth thaws down dream and speculative frost work, and the human spirit feels within it a presence, a light of being. The soul had sat by the wayside, holding out empty hands to all the passing systems, till Christ came ; then came sight and second birth—the talents fell into the bankrupt palms.

Modern scepticism accepts the talents and ignores the Giver; rejoices in progress, but sees no connection between progress and Christ. Have not the latest labours of unbelief been an attempt to remint the Christian talents, and to substitute for the image of Christ the features of development ? Those who most praise the upward movement of humanity are most inclined to deny that that movement was initiated by Christ. We, like the servants, see Christ feeding the roots of all development and human growth. To Him we ascribe the new conscience in

the breast of Christendom—the idea and the fact of a new morality. We thus assign a cause to spiritual growth ; whereas to assert that Christianity is merely one among many soul-evolutions, is like affirming that the earth without germs, and in the absence of light and heat, can evolve out of her own resources, harvests, vineyards, and forests.

But if Christ is the new conscience in the race, it is because He is first of all the cause and origin of spiritual life in the individual. The awakened memory garnering the harvest of the years, the night of penitence and barbed remorse, the keen-edged irony of conscience, the death which is a birth, the inward sunrise, the consciousness of a twofold personality—are all from Him. “Christ liveth in me,” therefore “I live.” Many had cast *thoughts* into the treasury, One alone sets a new life beating in the heart. The central pith of Christianity is no pale spectre realm of dogma, but a Person touching, quickening, transfiguring and absorbing person—till the shattered, arid soul, through being lifted into Christ becomes a new creation, rife with possibilities, and striking out at all points into bud and bloom. Every Christian disciple re-echoes the words “Thou deliveredst unto *me*,” Thou hast given me the chemistry of soul life, that drinks in at root and leaf the natural and transforms it into the supernatural; that builds up

broader manhood out of time, tribulation, defeat ; and gathers increase from loss, sacrifice, and death.

The servants know the *number* as well as the origin of their talents. They do not confound their respective endowments. They neither exaggerate nor diminish ; they simply maintain fealty to fact. Five is the sacred number of one ; two of the other. They have studied at that university where men learn the dimensions of their individual being, where he who would master the philosophy or meet the obligation of life must graduate. Whoever is unfamiliar with himself as premiss, will but live a random inference. Ask what is your potentiality ; then you have your day's work before you. When we know what is given, we know what can be accomplished. One secret of every great and fruitful life is a just estimate of its strength. What order of beginnings, of germ is in this shell ? When covered by time the warm breasted mother bird, shall eagle or swan be the result ? He is highly gifted who can gauge his gifts—who can lay beneath the future, foundations of the requisite breadth, who knows to a man the army which he carries against the world's legions. What are our endowments, mental and spiritual ? Are we men of five talents or two ? Here, mistake is vital. Suppose the servant of five talents had fancied himself

possessed of only two, and the servant with two imagined himself the owner of five—what would have happened? Both would have suffered shipwreck; one by doing too little, the other through attempting too much. God's order would have been violated, and the world would have witnessed what it so often sees—a strong man playing at life, while his brother struggles beneath a weight of empire to which he was never born. Or had the men imagined their gifts to be equal, they would have failed as certainly. But they knew that they stood on different planes, and that is the half of knowledge. He sees far who sees the exact distance between himself and other men, who can turn in on himself and say, 'Here the gold ends and the clay begins.' His life chants onward within its own shores, deep in God's rest. He knows his relations to life and heaven; his resources limit and define his attempts.

A man of two talents may break his heart in the fruitless effort to gain five. He will be rent by the demon of despondency because he is first seduced by the demon of ambition. Thousands of men die uncrowned because they cannot accept inferiority. Many run themselves into the gauge of their own desires, or of the unwise verdict of friends. And thus a poet is buried in prose, and a man who has feet to walk, but no wings of fire to uplift him into ranges of rapture and thinking trance, founders in

a lake of rhyme. Whosoever carries within him an indefinite dowry, sins against obligation. How can we know what is to be attempted, or what is expected, till we have ascertained what is bestowed? While over-estimating or under-estimating our capacities and resources, successful Christian service is impossible. The field of labour and the class of labour are chosen blindfold. Christians who could plough, betake themselves to reaping; those designed to sow, have a desire to weed and water God's field. Christians ordained to lead fall into the ranks, and men born to serve aspire to command. Nay, the plough is dragged into the harvest field and the sickle is employed as a ploughshare.

What if the servants had all their life attributed their endowments to chance or fate, and only now discovered their indebtedness to God? What if they had come up with the entrusted talents alone, or, what is worse, empty of gift and gain alike? One thing they could not lose—the memory of what they had received from their Lord. Earth and the grave sleep in the far off past, but the soul has borne its records from the falling pile; it reads itself like an open book. Suppose a man beginning another world with this recollection for inward furniture, Thou deliveredst, and I lost! O memory, the lost were only half lost, couldst thou like hope be left behind!

In the second place, the faithful servants render an account of what they have effected for their Lord. "I have gained other five talents" (*alia quinque*), says the first: "behold I have gained other two" (*alia duo*), says the second. Put all this outcome of talent together, and you have the Church's day's work in the world. This is strictly speaking what humanity has accomplished; this much of history and no more is divine; this is the wheat-yield of all the years; and this is what the Church has done for the world: acknowledged or ignored, she has held its revenues, and it has advanced only as she has grown. How much of heavenly merchandise she brings to the world's shores! Does she not draw down currency of light, spirit and life? Does she not draw into her commerce the supernatural, Christ, and satrapies of saints and angels? Are not all events trade winds, blowing heavenly fleets into her harbours? The very air stirs with her unseen merchantmen. This much of earth she has turned into heaven; the gains are the successive rings of her growth: what amid disorder, disintegration and death, she has organized, vitalized. For the Church is a living organism, gathering into her life the world's death. She is a talent maker: she transmutes the soul and society into a higher metal.

But let us look at the gains in their relation to

individuals. The added talents have a history. The pile of gold on the merchant's desk speaks of consuming care, sleepless nights, days and months of suspense, manifold hazards, sea perils, and uncertain ventures. How many agencies, activities, and factors it implies! Through how many hands and from how many quarters has it come! And these new talents are the result of much trading: they are fished up from all seas, and sifted out of wide experience. Look at them and you will see that faith, doubt, affliction, bereavement, sorrow, disappointment, time, have all paid tithe into this treasury and been in commerce with these men. Tribulations, fiery annealings, persecutions, wrestlings, failures, schoolings, and hot refinings—all social, satanic, and heavenly influences have paid in to the general result. There has been much watching, much service, much sacrifice, much drawing of the sword against self. There have been tests of faith, marches in the dark, nights on the deep, and dragging anchors. There has been commerce with the unseen, wintering in the harbour calm of great truths, frequent opening of the soul gates to spiritual fleets. Innumerable spirit crafts have swept in with their freight—as many have sailed out of port into the unknown—laden with the passions, the frailties, the doubts, the poverty, the soul lumber of the merchants. 'I

have gained from how many marts, ports, and centring lines of trade. I have reaped how many causes, laws and energies ; have had all things in my service working together for my good, and this is the result.'

"I have gained" is a bold word for that place and that day. It rings with victory. Before the bar of public opinion these men may have appeared losers ; for those who keep their souls forfeit the world, as certainly as those who gain the world lose their souls. But gain and loss on the lips of spirit burn with new meaning ; and thus refined, they are the watchwords of that day. I have gained—finished work, garnered result. The trade factors are removed. Here we see the world working out its account of profit and loss ; there the process is complete. The talents were given on earth and increased on earth. Now they lay the foundations of a wider merchandise. The influences of this little world shoot far into the infinite : they beat like a pulse in the eternal. The servants teach us to look in God's endings for our beginnings. To the last link in the series of endowment must be joined the first in the series of increase. The master leaves off at five and two ; there the servants take up the progression. The divine work is perfect as far as it goes, but incomplete without the play of human capacity. So the human, though a requisite part of the whole, is

nothing by itself. After spiritual endowment something must be done; before that endowment nothing can be accomplished. A man must say, "Thou deliveredest," before he can say, "I have gained." To meet the idea and the requirements of life, he must be able to affirm both. In salvation, "I" has a part to play as well as "Thou." The work that we cannot do is divine; the work that God leaves undone is human. When He gives talents He gives more, He bequeaths scope and power to add to their number.

I have said that the servants teach us to look in God's endings for our beginnings; we must draw the line between finality and perfection. The final in all God's kingdoms waits to be welded to the initial in man, as the convulsions and grindings of geologic cycles merely prepare for the bulbs and radicles of the vegetable kingdom. Many fleets have beaten themselves to staves against the angles of God's finals. Those who founder on this point are of two classes: men who detect incompleteness in finality, but mistake its significance, and men who see in the final, nothing but full-sphered perfection. In the first class are those who see in man, in nature, in divine and social government, a broken column, something suggesting and requiring complement. They lose themselves in this jungle of incompleteness, and sadly ask, 'Can a

universe of halves and segments be the work of the Perfect ?' They expected spheres, and lo, they are flayed with edges and angles. To them man is but a fragment among fragments, fretting in the ebbs and flows of fate. Let such look deeper, and they will see that man is incomplete because there is a God, and that this frayed hem of the world ends in thrums because man is here to weave in his life and will, and thus make the web complete. Again, there are those who meet this class, though starting from an opposite point. They leave no scope for man, no play-room for human faculty and will. The world must pause at God's terminal line, whether it be five or two. There is no field for merchandise or growth. No balance, no complement can be added to the divine sphere work. The entrusted talents are no more germinal than chalk eggs. Occasion may brood over them for ever without awaking life or growth. All finals, though really causes, are regarded as results. And this is but Augustine and Calvin in fruit. But we can have no sympathy with a view that finds room for man only in an inventory of fate. Those who hold it, leave a wide armour joint for the shafts of scepticism ; and what is worse, by freezing man down on a globe of ice, they smite him with the paralysis of despair, or send him into the drugged sleep of spiritual indolence. There is a line where divine

causation ceases, and human origination begins—where the divine and human wills meet and interlace. Perhaps that line is most clearly defined in man, who is first result and then cause, who is an embodied thought and who embodies thought. God comes out in result to a certain point, and then turns into the far country again. That point which seems an end, we shall discover to be a beginning—a bulb waiting to be carried on to development by implantation in our faculty and will. Even what is heaven-born becomes more divine by becoming more human. The ideal is latent in all things, expressed in few; it is latent in all men and expressed in One. In the natural kingdoms, God has left wide scope for man—without man the world lies in trance; almost every order of vegetation lives a dwarfed, orphan life, till he adopts it. He spreads himself beneath the roots of all growth and beauty, as a cause leading on towards the ideal. The soil, the flowers, the grasses, the grains, the trees, the beasts of the field, need his ministry; Nature is unable to break her shell until he comes to her aid. Even the human form awaits the artist's steel for higher birth of beauty. Minerva flew out of the brain of Jupiter. The same order obtains in the field of mind and spirit. God sows the mind with faculty, and vanishes from the field; He sows the spirit with the ripened grain of *His*

year to be the seed corn of *our* year. We may warp the truth if we please, we may contend that if three and four are the divine ideal, God will carry up the series. But while we reason He breaks off in the middle, and the work passes on from will to will. There are your beginnings—so much red clay, and an Adam is required. The prophets and seers of society grasp this truth ; they find themselves surrounded by divine endings, by divine ideas, plans, and purposes, waiting to become incarnate in their life ; they discover on all hands seed-worlds asking for human souls in which to unfold themselves ; they see God waiting in His fleets of salvation and Gospel to sail along the trade currents of their will ; they wait not on God to move, for He is waiting on them. They are challenged by the divine to set it moving in the arteries of society and thought.

Man has need of God, and God has need of man ; Christ brings salvation, and the Church declares it ; He confers talents, and faith multiplies them. The servants' life-work was to augment their Lord's gifts. The Lord bestowed life, they radiated life ; He enlightened them, they kindled the flame of faith and enthusiasm in the breast of others ; He delivered to their soul a heavenly dowry, they in their turn made many rich. The heavenly gifts in human hands widened the circle of their influence. Grace

is aggressive ; where it lives it conquers. In a world where most lose, faith gains. It turns fear to hope, and hope to substance.

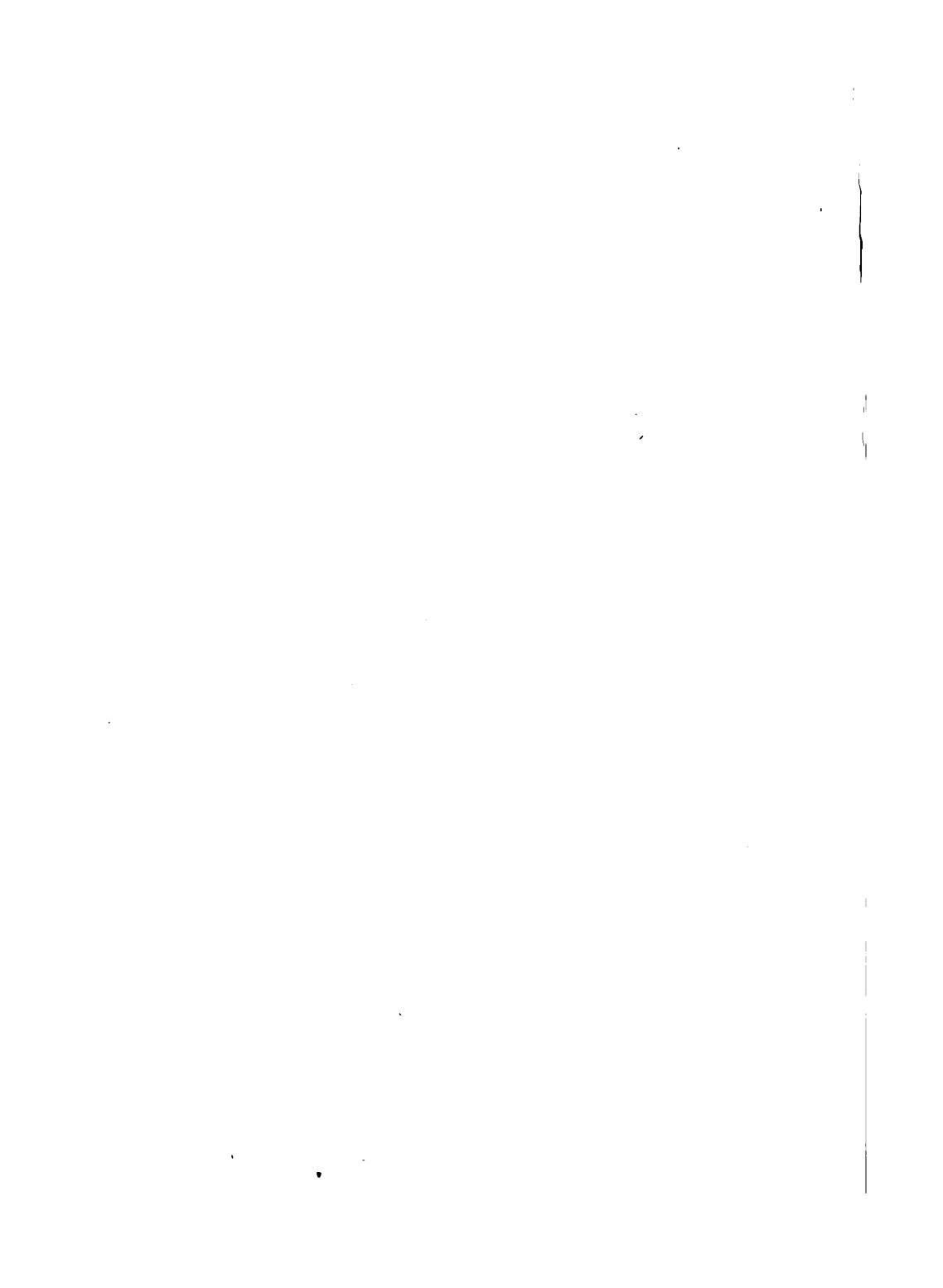
Christianity is not conservative but expansive. It widens with the market. The Church will not be asked how she has held traditions, but what she has reaped from commerce. Human salvation on God's side is the execution of a work, not the expression of a sentiment ; on our side, salvation is not a faith but a life. Unless we can show what we have done, it is vain to say what we have believed.

And now I come to the third point, which I have already anticipated—that the faithful servants connect their endowment and success as cause and result. The words *ἐπ' αὐτοῖς* (beside them), are omitted in some manuscripts and rejected by several eminent scholars. They may have been added to tone down the boldness of the servants' speech, by some scribe more careful of humility than of the sacred text ; or perhaps they were first appended as key-words, and then "inspired" by time and use. They are harmless however, they add nothing but themselves. Strike them out, and it is clear that the Lord's gift underlay the servants' gain as enabling cause ; retain them, and you have the same truth. When the servants say, we have gained other five and other two, they simply speak of carrying on what was delivered to them as cause,

to its final result. They connect gains with gifts, and imply that the first are possible on the ground of the second. They know nothing of unaided human redemption, of regeneration by the force of development. Neither do they know anything of predestination. They exercise their freedom, modify and alter the condition in which their Master leaves them; do when they could undo; believe that the work which is level to man is left to man. They seize the true significance of life, and place grace and obligation in just relations. They weave James in with Paul. If they live and have their being in God, they also *move* in God; they carry the naked grain of spring on to the full-eared glow of harvest.

The servant in Luke says, "Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds." Here, the language is different, but the thought is the same. It is no more meant that the pound became ten apart from instrumentality, than that the talents doubled apart from use. The increase in both cases is grace in fruit,—"I laboured, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." Grace without *me* does not labour, neither do *I* labour without grace. The labour of the servants is a matter of fact, as real as if they rested for salvation on their effort, and yet, as we have seen, it is the result of grace—not grace that reduces man to a cipher, but

grace that sets him moving in and with God. The widened range of being is built up out of God. The servants merely did what the world on a lower plane does every day ; they guided and directed the life forces wherewith they were entrusted. They found themselves in a great stewardship ; they entered the market gates of faith and sacrifice ; their Master, in the garb of trade, met them there, and to cause added result.



VIII.

MINISTRY REWARDED BY HIGHER
MINISTRY.

MATT. XXV. 21—23.

HIS LORD SAID UNTO HIM, WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT: THOU HAST BEEN FAITHFUL OVER A FEW THINGS, I WILL MAKE THEE RULER OVER MANY THINGS: ENTER THOU INTO THE JOY OF THY LORD.

VIII.

MINISTRY REWARDED BY HIGHER MINISTRY.

THIS glorious choir of harping words breaks forth from a conscience full of light and rest, and is the sphere psalm of the Redeemer's inward life while He speaks. At this point the parable moves along the plane of Christ's consciousness, catches up the rhythm of that deepest heaven, and reports the verdict daily spoken in the soul of the Servant of servants. None but a heart perfect in its approving repose could have struck such a key of praise; none but Christ could have conceived a hymn in the mother tongue of serene, sovereign conscience. The beatitudes range higher than all intellectual creations; only He can speak them who has felt and who can confer them. As Prophet and Interpreter of the higher ranges of feeling, Christ stands alone. He is at home in the profoundest life of the spirit, and when He thus brings

life to light, we can only enter into His sayings by *feeling* our way down their depths. Christ in the wide ranging sovereignty of His feeling, and in His creations representing feeling in all its moods, can only be explained when we admit that He is the Life. Having thus viewed these words as a conscience creation, having glanced into their subjective history, I pass on to consider them in their objective aspect as related to the servants.

Linked with its connection, this part of the parable lies out of sight, and is here only as prophecy, or as light streaming through the veil. Before we can hear it, we must pass through the fierce annealings of life and the solemn pathos of death. In our parable lie all the latitudes of finite being and experience : the life of ungifted servitude, the opening of heavenly stores and distribution of spiritual dowry, the consecrated use of divine inspirations and energies, the swan-song of faith in the falling dew and night, the hour of reckoning, the open door of the Father's house, and in the far distance, the grim empire of tears and hopeless night. The words "well done" are for the lips of the future. They speak of work faithfully finished and graciously acknowledged. They are out of place while the steels are eating the marble into shape, or the hammers are smiting on the white iron. But while they may not be spoken to us here, they

may be heard within us. They are the vernacular of a healthy conscience prophesying in the true man's breast, and bearing the inspired burden and verdict of God. To every Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, an eternal priest comes forth with benedictions and bread and wine. Wherever the tempter has been repulsed, or a cross for self has stood, where loss for Christ has been sustained, or a furnace bravely endured, these words have broken out in the conscience like a living spring. Sorrow, tribulation, sacrifice, are reeds on which a good conscience can blow the sweetest strains.

Joining the two verses together, we see that the Judge accords to the servants a community of praise, that He throws open to their enlarged energies a wider range of ministry, and that He admits them to profounder blessedness. This vein of thought I shall endeavour to follow.

1. The Judge accords to the servants a community of praise. He addresses them separately, but in identical terms. The twenty-first and twenty-third verses are word for word the same. Individuality is thrown into keen relief. Each hears for himself the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant;" each is isolated by his own praise, deeply ensphered in the terms of God's approval. And thus the great hunger of all sincere souls is fed.

158 *MINISTRY REWARDED BY HIGHER MINISTRY.*

Every Christian heart longs to sit open-doored in the councils of a higher mind, to be alone when God speaks, to have the assurance that this voice is for *it*. The half of the fight on earth is appropriation, a localization of the universal. While believing firmly that Scripture is a voice from heaven, the soul asks, Is it a voice for *me*? May I localize and apply it to myself? Many a strong and gifted nature consumes its marrow here-bound to faith in the general—unable to come to belief in the particular—like a buoy chained, but not grounded and settled. Bread for this deep hunger comes at last, and the soul is lifted into isolation, not from, but in and with God. But this isolation becomes an isthmus binding soul to soul in everlasting unity. Conscience is the underlying bond or *nexus* of the human race, and it is on the plane of conscience that all the good meet in equality. All good consciences speak the universal language and sustain the same relationships to holiness and truth. For them, justice, truth, and holiness have only one voice, and must strike the same pitch and express themselves in the same formula. For what are the words which the servants hear but the Divine nature and attributes in chorus, Christ singing His creation hymn in souls—filling the Church with a sea-like depth and pressure of joy? The same electric wave passes through all, because

all clasp hands in circle on a common plane of character. When a mighty nature glows and pulses with glad ardours, it is reduced to few notes, perhaps a tear, perhaps the silent ebbs and flows of its own tides. And here is Christ's great, silent love breaking out in its moan of joy, Well done, well done—εὖ, εὖ. Here distinctions die out, the good are equal, one in will with their Lord and with each other.

The two servants are alike in the grand elements of character. Both are good and faithful. In ability and endowment they differ; one had more talents at the beginning than the other at the close of his stewardship. They may have plied their trade in different markets. They could hardly have made the same appearance in the Church or world. Their biographies may have been very unlike, one aglow with hope—a snatch of brook-like music, the other overcast, dejected, tempted. One life may have been weak, the other strong; one may have ended in a jail, the other in a palace; one man may have been John of the Apocalypse, the other John the Baptist; one a master-builder, the other a spiritual hodman. To the two men art, literature, nature, life, man, God, spoke in widely different voices. But gifted differently, labouring separately, judged, applauded, rewarded separately—they are not two, but one in the great elements

of character,—goodness and faithfulness. Their creed is not mentioned, character is more than creed. It is unlikely that two men standing at such intellectual distance could subscribe the same confession of faith. They grow unequally; one exhausts the seed bed more in a year than the other in three. The same creed-shell is rent, outgrown and thrown off by one much sooner than by the other. Unity of belief, like Plato's Republic, can only exist on paper; unity of spirit has passed into fact, and formed the real bond of brotherhood. Are we then to lift our axe against all formulated doctrine? By no means. To teach that doctrine is of no consequence to Christian life, is like affirming that there can be a vigorous brain apart from the spinal column. But we are bound to maintain that no creed, no confession exhausts the truth; that Christ cannot be reduced to syllogisms, and that disparity in mental depth and range, creates divergence in faith. Should the man of two talents happen to be the creed maker, we must demand for the brother of higher gifts a broader basis for his faith. After all, creeds are but fragments of the truth, and in their use we must beware that the Christian armies do not slay each other with stone axes from the same quarry, with edged splinters of the same sphere. In the Father's house of faith and truth there are many mansions, and some of

us look into the rising and others into the setting sun. But while there are diversities of mental approach, there is one spirit. In point of goodness and fealty, the two servants do not differ even in degree. One is not good and the other better; the goodness of both is as perfect as a sphere.

Goodness is the presence of God in the soul, the readjustment of all the powers and capabilities, the healthy exercise of a new life, the mind in harmony with God and at war with sin. We speak of anything as good or bad in proportion as it reaches or fails to reach its ideal. We express the standard in the noun, and the approach to, or departure from it, in the adjective. Here the ideal is *doulos*—servant. A good servant is one who fulfils the condition and promise of his name. He is a servant, no more and no less. This is the Christian's true sphere, his ideal relation to life and God. A servant is girt and governed by a higher will. He cannot be his own lawgiver. He is only free to move along the line of his Master's law, in obedience and subjection. Reasons lie beyond his province. He carries dust to God for the nucleus of new spheres, new heavens, and new earths. The secret of creation the Creator keeps to Himself. What has the hodman, hewer, or builder to do with ground plans? Can Wren's workmen take in the draft of his creation? Yet

they print and publish his thoughts in stone types. When service becomes perfect it moves to this refrain : " I came not to do my own will, but the will of Him that sent me ; I can of mine own self do nothing : as I hear I judge." The very name servant denotes action and allotted work. The *doulos* is a medium, a factor for carrying ideas into acts. The range of activity is wide, the whole nature may move around its entire circle of powers, or converge all its pressure on a point. But action of one order or another is the condition of service, and when it freezes, sloth sets in, drawing wickedness in its wake, for wickedness is sloth carried into its results. The servant's field is allotted and the tools and appliances for his work provided. The *doulos* is confined by time and space—fenced around by conditions. He is in trust, he holds so many talents, he bears the keys of stewardship for himself, for society, and for God. Putting these conditions together, and lifting the stewardship into a spiritual level, we have the good servant. Subjection is to be in the will and character of God; unquestioning obedience is faith; the activity of the servant is the new life in motion ; fulfilment of the conditions of the spiritual *doulos* is goodness.

Christianity is compatible with great ignorance and slenderest attainments. She will not disdain to dwell with men of conflicting opinions, of vary-

ing capabilities and temperaments ; but she will make no terms with evil. He who is bad cannot be Christian, and he who is Christian cannot be bad. He who is not good is unfit to minister at any altar, unfit to trade with the talents, or to teach others the merchandise of life. He may raise doubts, he may fill the air with dark questionings, he may lead the dark into deeper jungles of doubt ; but he must not set himself in Moses' chair, or assume the attitude of authority. The Christ of God is good, and alone reveals Himself to the pure in heart. The burning gateways into light are for those whose whole body is full of light. The good man holds the keys of life, and every thought of God is open-doored to him. But a bad heart is no fair judge of God's unfolding plan. It is out of sympathy with the Designer, and how can it construe the design ? It is eyeless, and there is no vision where there is no retina. Goodness is the foundation stone of character—nay, it is character in its completeness ; it is the soul's abiding inheritance. If death and it struggle, it is death that dies. Seeing, then, that goodness is requisite, paramount, the first and last table of the new commonwealth, it follows that the grand end and aim of life is to be good. Goodness first, happiness afterwards. We sadly err if we think that the world-mill is grinding down bread

for pleasure or happiness. We even err when we conclude that all things groan and travail to be delivered of the cross. The groans we hear are prayers to be born into sacrifice. All things work together for good to them that love God; not in the weak, selfish sense of bringing in wider revenues of advantage, or even of deepening the heart's peace, but in the nobler sense of working out a perfectly harmonious character, and of conforming the servant to the image of the Son. When we consider the nature of the all things, and the manner of their operation, we can clearly see that if designed to be ministers of happiness, they sadly fail. Most of the *panta*—all things—are keen edged, severe, digging into our life like the hewer's steel. Pain in all its forms, tribulation, and death, are among the number. All these, like the scythes on the axle of the war chariot, revolve in grim harmony, hewing down the enemies and evils of the soul, and working out triumphs of holiness and strength. No doubt the ultimate result is happiness, quietness, and assurance for ever; but it is happiness founded in goodness, and which comes not as an aim, but flows as an attendant issue. If the present life has any voice more distinct than another it is this, that God takes more pains with His people's character than with their comfort. We cannot teach too clearly or strongly that con-

forming and not comforting occupies the fore front of Christianity. We by no means put the issue for Christianity fairly when we ask if it cannot bring men to the attainment of peace. The real question is, Can Christianity lift men into the sphere of goodness? Can it create a new and holy character? If it fails here, it forfeits its claim: if it succeeds here, it carries all that it contemplates. Christ, it is true, leads men into joy, but just because He leads them into holiness. The new life begins with a cry, a note of pain, which breaks the soul's hollow peace; and it is perfected by nurture, chastisement, discipline. In an economy of restoration and re-creation what can we see but Ceres throwing her Triptolemus into the fire to make him immortal? As beings begirt with time and grace, we have first to do with character; goodness affects us nearly, vitally. The joy of the Lord, as we shall see, can only come in at a certain stage of being; the framework of goodness is wrought out on earth. The two servants are good as men—good as servants before they are girt with rule, or drawn into the world of profounder life. They have graduated in character, they have built up the fabric of spiritual being on earth. The transfiguration of the moral nature precedes the death of the physical. Death confers no new attributes. Like spring, it brings birth

and scope, leads latent life into new activity and form ; but like spring it creates nothing. Eternity, like time, may be thickly sown with beginnings, beginnings which are the endings of time ; among these will be man, striking root in the Eden of the spirit. But while eternity takes up rudiments, and is field for expansion in good, does it call goodness into existence ? Strictly speaking, is there even growth of goodness in heaven in any other sense than that the soul is deeper in holiness because it is wider in being ? For example, does the thief who enters paradise with Christ, require to pass through some fervent crucible to be refined from the ore of evil ? I think the Sacred Writings return a decided negative. I do not know that they warrant the doctrine of growth in purity and holiness after death. They are full of terms inconsistent with character in its alloy. The blessedness which they assign to the sainted dead, presents an insuperable bar to the doctrine of purgatorial cleansings. “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord ;” “so shall they be for ever with the Lord ;” “having a desire to depart and be with Christ which is far better ;” “these are they who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Such language can only apply to the spirits of just men made perfect in character. The saint who is born in death may begin the fortunes

of the heavenly state as a child, considering the growth before him ; but it is as a holy child. And yet the feeling often smites us with fierce recoil, that if we died to-day we should awake at a sad distance from perfection of character. Looking at ourselves as reflected from within or from without, the shadow is blurred and dark. We feel that the new man within is leprous, withered, rudimentary. Sometimes we even stagger through the inward chaos, striving to discover whether we possess a new nature at all. Our highest thoughts and purest inspirations are so veined with earth and grit of unholly passion. The old pagan conception treads heavily along the pathway of our consciousness, the conception in which the fronts of men and gods were wed with inhuman, hideous shapes. Perhaps antiquity embodied its consciousness in those grotesque combinations, in which the god slides into the brute. At any rate, it has fore stalled and expressed ours. Our higher nature so files off into coils of earthliness, the two natures so adhere and mix, that we can hardly for a moment perceive the spiritual nature moving disengaged and free across the theatre of our experience and thought. And thus we keenly feel that the chasm between the perfect state and ours is wide and deep. There even lurks in the remoter chambers of thought, the conviction that death has

some refining heat, consuming and eating off our sand mould; and this conviction is partly founded in truth. The outer nature that sheltered the assailants and the antagonisms of the better life is rent off. The soul is absent from the body, and the *I* of the new life is with the Lord in the nearness of conformity and likeness. Pacing hotly up and down the grim cave of consciousness, we can come to no just conclusion on the subject. We are ever confounding the spiritual *me* with the unspiritual. We must come out into revealed light where we see the soul-flower rising complete and pure out of death.

As the servants of our parable could not be bad and faithful, so neither could they be unfaithful and good. Fidelity and goodness are twin-born—inseparable as a lily and its beauty. Faithfulness is the mode of goodness, the incarnate practical shape of the high, inward principle. Our English word faithful simply means to be full of the element or quality of faith. Here the translation is very happy, for the Greek *pistos* grows out of the same root with *pistis*, faith, and is nearly assimilated to it in form and sound. Both words draw their life out of the idea of persuasion, confidence, trust. Paul employs the root word when he exclaims: “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded—*pepeismai*—that He is able to keep that

which I have committed unto Him ;” and again, when he burns up the ascent of his great hymn in the eighth of Romans : “ For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, &c., shall be able to separate us from the love of God.” Here faith ripens into the harvest of triumphant persuasion ; the chalice is *faith-full*. Faithfulness derives its pith from the soul’s persuasion of the truth. Fidelity and heroic steadfastness wrap their roots around the heart’s trust in God. In the absence of faith fidelity becomes impossible. The faith of the servant calls forth the trust and confidence of his Lord. If Paul commits his spiritual fortunes to Christ, Christ entrusts him with the glorious gospel of the blessed God. The harvest and vintage of the world’s growth can only be given to faith ; and hence there is no human wreck so grim as when the ship of faith, divinely freighted, goes down and settles on the cold bottom of unbelief. The faithful life redeems and justifies God’s persuasion of its fidelity ; it proves itself worthy of having been taken into counsel, confidence and trust : and this it does through the efficient energy of its own living faith. Persuasion of the truth is the tap-root of fidelity. It is only when grounded in the truth that a man can be true to the instincts of his nature, or to the talent charge committed to him. The persuasion of God’s living nearness fills

the heart with the magnitude of its trust. And the Christian disciple, deep in the convictions of faith, is deep in the light of the unseen; out of that unseen he works his armour and borrows his heroic heat. No great faithful life begins at the exhausted bulb of unbelief. Abraham, Moses, Socrates and Paul are ever moving in the third heaven of conviction, ever holding, like John's glass sea, the celestial fire in their own consciousness. They endure as seeing Him who is invisible; they acted as God would have acted had He been in their stead. Hence Socrates struck fairly for the vein of truth, when he conceived his will and personality as at times absorbed by a higher personality; he saw glinting through avenues of mist, what Paul realised as the central fact of his consciousness, "Christ liveth in me." Thus the servants under consideration knew nothing in reality of an absent Lord. The inner seed-field which He had sown, ripened under His rays. The servants were deep in the ardours of their holy passion to keep their plighted troth. In market, bank, exchange, or field, they hear the charge, "Be thou faithful unto death." They act, witness and endure as if their Master stood by their side. Their energies are engaged and their soul absorbed in one grand enterprise — the increase of their Lord's money. They banish selfishness and sloth.

They neither trade on their own capital nor seek their own interest. Even their success is ascribed to a power outside themselves. Deep in the powers of the world to come, they move as powers in society, and fill with heart and pulse the words, "No man liveth to himself." Their day begins with their Lord's departure and ends with His return, for to the heart moving in God's light and will there is no night. They receive, keep, augment, and joyfully restore. One gains more than the other possessed, yet both are faithful. Faithfulness is relative. A judge ignorant of the two men's antecedents would have rewarded one and condemned the other. But Christ considers in what chasings our lives are set. With Him Chorazin is worse than Sodom, and a heathen in England than a heathen in India. The works of two men may be equal and their reward different, or they may be unequal and their reward alike. We are faithful when we fill our circumstances to their shores with our tide of being; when we draw out of the root of possibility its latent growth and ideal; when we have occupied our own talents without breaking faith with God. The width of theatre is nothing. Have we enacted our part? Wide or narrow, has our play of faculty moved in the rhythm of eternal will?

The form the praise assumes is suggestive; it

states what is and implies what might have been : "well done" reminds us that it might have been ill done. There was earth enough to bury five talents and two as well as one. Each servant had power to prostrate his power. Each held the approaches of death and life. Each filled his ministering angel with concern as he started to run the blockade of being. With the talent hider before Him, the Master cannot but feel that the other two might have been talent hiders also. He can more fully appreciate their goodness than if the three had been alike faithful. The guilt of the one brings out the noble integrity of the others.

Praise cannot be offered to necessity. A necessary line of action possesses no merit, no character. Had it been impossible for these men to bury their talents, had they been under the necessity of doubling them, no rational being would have praised either their keeping or augmenting, no more than he would praise a wheel for keeping its iron rail. But the applause signifies that these beings, through the grace of God, have come up in the freedom of their will, to immortality and eternal life. It glances at right and wrong, and sketches the attributes of a being free and responsible—a being who had the deeps beneath his keel, but who has kept the faith. Seen in this light the praise is no mere formality. It overflows with the Master's

joy at the victory of His servants. Spoken on the other side, and in view of the hostile forces which held the approaches of being, "good and faithful" gathers into itself an intense, glowing significance.

The eulogium, unlike most others, is true, well timed and appropriate. It comes in at the end of all, and falls on those alone who deserve it. The qualities are commended that the world ignores, while the qualities which the world commends have here no place. It is not "well done" wealthy servant, prosperous servant, successful servant. The science that coins religious credulity and ignorance, that in the name of truth buys the gaze of crowds by feeding their disease; the capacity of defrauding decently, the spirit that trims between God and mammon, the elastic gospel of selfishness and sleek indifference, exulting in negatives,—are of no account with this Master. "Good and faithful servant,"—blessed words! After the brazen din of slander and calumny, how sweetly will they sound! How welcome to those who have borne the cross or passed through the mill of worldly and ecclesiastical malice, with few to encourage and many to dissuade! How welcome to the saints who have taken refuge beneath the altar from the slings of confessions, standards, and synods; who have entered heaven, bleeding from the fangs of satire and the strangling coil of orthodoxy! They are

the eternal peace-dove in the heart of all who suffered for the "testimony which they held," from Socrates to the seer of Rowe. The half of heresy is but to-morrow in to-day; futurity is the greatest heretic; and although the world will never see this, let the men in the front file of thought be strong; if they are with the future, let the present curse, Christ will bless. "Good and faithful servant" is the heavenly name of thousands who still undergo the crucifixions of history. How long has the goodly fellowship of Puritans cried from under the altar! "Good and faithful" will take many a servant by surprise. God numbers among the conquerors men whose lives seemed a failure. In a country like ours, failure and success are terms of mensuration—terms worn thin by vulgar use. England sacrifices to the God of bulk, quantity is its divinity. Spiritual results and power are measured with the same chain as earthly fortunes. We ask how much ground a man covers with his houses, name, and gold. We pronounce success or failure according to the room occupied. This spirit might do for the world, but it passes intensified into the Church. The scales of commerce are the balance of the sanctuary. The priest stands or falls at the point of dimension. What is the area of his Church, the size of his congregation? If he is first in these respects he is foremost on the

roll of success, and so Foster, Lynch, and Maurice must be heaved out among the potsherds and shot-dust. The ministry richest in futurity and real power will often grow sick to feel that it is measured as a physical quantity. The experience of Elijah is reversed. God has forsaken the still, small voice, and passed into the whirlwind. The spiritual treasure has come into the gauge of earthly vessels, in a sense of which Paul never dreamed.

It is clear that most of us are not in a position to say when a life has succeeded or failed. Time works sad havoc on *our* book of life. We forget that there are men of a year and men of eternity unfolding side by side in the same time-field, and that the flowers which exhaust themselves in a season, often outshine the perennial. But the perennial have within them millenniums of summer bloom—the power of an endless life. There is a broad distinction between the lives which ripen to die and those which die to ripen. In the world's rough sense the former succeed while the latter fail; in the true sense, he has no foreground of life who has no background of death. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone," it is girt with isolation and sterility. Falling out of sight among the furrows of society and dying there, is the fixed condition

of life and power, the condition which Christ accepted for Himself. The history of the world's greatest life is a story of descent and burial. To Christ's contemporaries and countrymen He was only notable as a person who attempted certain things and failed. From a worldly view-point He had lived in vain : 'A nature rarely gifted, but completely thrown away.' Men who had risen to fortune either as *prætors* or high priests, could only compare such a life to water spilled on desert sands. The day of preaching and of kingship set in grim disaster. We can easily imagine men who had an eye for the main chance, thus estimating the results of Messiah's life : 'He preached, but where are His adherents or the synagogues which He founded ? He *spoke* of a kingdom, but He established none. He promised that His disciples should inherit the earth, and He has His grave. He promised eternal life, and yet He died. He has failed at all points, and here He sleeps in His grave of defeat.' And if success consist in attaining our ideal, or in meeting the expectation of the world, Christ's career must be pronounced the most unsuccessful ever run. It prospers at no point ; it ends in wreck. But in whatever respect Christ really or seemingly failed along the way, He did not fail to *die*. Where His life and purpose fell into ruin, they rose into consummation. His-

tory taking up the exhausted shell, wrote, 'He is vanquished,' at the moment when Christ exclaimed, *Tetelestai, It is finished.* The same experience repeats itself in the lives of the saints. When beaten into the ground by the strokes of what appears an adverse fate, they are nearest the power of resurrection. When their blood flows out of their veins, it enters the veins and feeds the brain of the world. The field of their darkest defeat reddens into their heaviest harvest. In their Golgotha the thoughts are born that prove the sceptres of society. The strongest, most fruitful lives, the lives that stir the spirit of to-day and fill with burning ardours the breasts of men, were not the successful lives of their time. The one figure that sways the world, rules it, as we have seen, from a cross. The spirits that stir in thought and religion, that sow themselves into generation after generation, that infuse into the body social its lime and iron, come up out of exile, jails and caves, and martyr fires. The voices which shake the earth, and the thoughts which give it light, cannot be traced back to kings' palaces and to foster-sons of luck. Almost all the mighty lives which strike root in our life were denied seed-room in their own day. The utilitarian god swept them out of his domain as idle chaff—swept them into the future. This is as it should be. The future has deeper soil, wider roods, and

warmer sunlight. There are lives which lie like winter roots in their generation, or which at best come up to wither in freezing winds. All their power is germ power, sleeping in potential sheath or rind. Their words are bulbs of living thought, and cut a poor figure beside the gum flowers of transient mob-leaders. Their influence is silent, subtle, unseen, passing down into society like sun-rays through deeps of air. Their very person and character seem shell-bound. Whether they write, or speak, or act, they are a curious enigma to their contemporaries. The inspired Shallows laugh at them, or perhaps pity. ‘These are incarnate dreams,’ say they, ‘who by mistake wandered through the gate of life.’ Time comes, and dries up the talking gourds, and they die with the darnel of their season; while the men who wove their roots around the heart of society grow up through its thoughts and life. The world is moved by forces elaborated in the past. The coal-seams are a power because we are distant from their formation. The thought-seams that feed the fires of our mental hearths are the growth of a thousand years. The leaven that moves along to-day was hidden in a remote yesterday; and the steels that are to shape the future are being tempered now. Those who shape the forces that move and mould society are mechanics; those who supply these

forces, whether out of brain or blood, are creators. Every man who spins sinews for the future, must with firmness meet the established law, that the wrights and blacksmiths of society, literary, scientific, or spiritual, will create a louder din, cover a wider theatre, and secure vastly more of what is called success than those who carry latent sceptres in their life. To the crowd the artificers will ever appear the creators; they and they alone will be fed by the Church's and the world's applause. But when they have grown dim and shrunken into their little sphere, those of wider, intenser being, who unseen gave the world its light and heat, shall come to the front of glory and power, and settle in the deep rest of Christ's "well done." This leads me to the next point.

2. That the Judge opens to the enlarged energies of the faithful servants a wider range of ministry,—"Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things." Plato's doctrine of reminiscence was only untrue because applied to the present life. Shifted onward it is less a speculation than a history. The heirs of immortality have a past into which they run back in reminiscence—"Thou hast been." This condition lies at the foundation of any perfect society—that it should have behind an initial stage, in which was wrought out the highest *talentum*, character. As far as we

know, it is a condition of being that its battle should be lost or won during its opening hours. It is certain that our past is still the heart of our present ; even as time buries the rod in the heart of the tree. This is the grand solemnity of being, that its first expression and surroundings become as it were its vital organs ; its childhood gives laws to its manhood. The rulers over many things were first faithful over a few. It is a fatal error that throws the present and future out of joint. The passage before us proclaims their unity. The Lord of the seen and the unseen is one. The hand that divides the goods invests with wider rule. He who has laid Himself beneath the servants' past as enabling cause, will, as efficient cause, underlie the roots of their future. Christ has great things to do for the believer after death. The words "I will make thee ruler," are sealed for the present, but they sketch a mighty future ; they suggest an increase of trust and power, an ascent on the stair of sacrifice. The Scriptures point to some sovereign kingship yet in store for the saints. Nor does it differ from that exercised by the faithful here, except in degree. In the one case the servants have received a few things ; in the other, they are entrusted with many ; and "if five talents are few, how great must be the amount of the many !" Even he who is deepest in stewardship

here is less than the least in the kingdom of the future.

Shall the redeemed, then, enter on a new ministry? Shall they serve before a heavenly altar, or become angels of light to other fallen worlds? Whatever form their service may assume, it is evident that they pass into a higher stewardship, for which they have served an apprenticeship in the past. They remain under the same administration; and as they governed on earth, are rulers still. The difference between their first and second entrance on stewardship is, that in the latter they begin with enlarged capacities and strengthened energies. They have gained volume of being and perfection of character. They have garnered in their lives the sheaves of many fields, but they have not outgrown ministry. Their elevation is a descent into deeper obligation. We have a shallow and unreal way of conceiving heaven to be a commonwealth of resting power and inert life. We sometimes even reduce it to a frozen gaze, a fixed, unmeaning stare. Inactivity occupies the foreground of almost all the current conceptions on the subject. The present is viewed as the theatre of melancholy, weary motion—the future as unshaken, mystic repose; the seen and the unseen are only brought together for the purpose of contrast. Out of this feeling has sprung a vast literature, a literature

often sweet, always mystic, never real; a kind of air lyre, on which the soul cries out for rest. But the harp that hangs on the willow sings but half the truth. The heart's prophecy of rest from sin is sure of fulfilment; death is a night that arrests the labours of our day; but a life of inertia has neither ground in Scripture nor in our spiritual constitution. The sooner we recast our conceptions of our future state the better. As long as they violate the profoundest instincts of our being, they work havoc on our inner life. Aristotle, in his search after God, made man the high road of ascent. Christianity waits for some one to move along the same path; to report at least what the future life is *not*. On spiritual or Christian man, must converge the light of analysis; he, and he only, has the roots of the future within him. We want some strong hand to clench the link between the two worlds —rather, we need some seer who shall pass through man like a flash of light, and reveal the future in the present and the present in the future. Most healthy minds feel shaken out of trust when they come to consider the traditional heaven. They recoil from a society so unreal, so deeply isolated from all we feel and know. A gazing, singing, indolent commonwealth, attracts less than it repels; and the only way to preserve faith is to fall back on the gleams of inspiration, and the verdict

of the spiritual instincts. I am persuaded that we should long for the future with a purer passion, and brave the present with firmer courage, if we could only see their underlying, essential unity, and trace all the life, form, and colour of the perfect state to the tap-root of this earth.

Death will not arrest intellectual activity. The axles of thought must move with increased intensity when near the central Mind. Imagination will go on creating, fancy comparing, memory restoring, reason weighing in her scales. Heaven will combine the seen and the unseen, and will therefore challenge both ranges of faculty. God in His essence must still remain out of sight ; the created is under the necessity of thinking the Creator. The world of intellectual truth will reveal itself to the intellect alone. Faith and joy have no eyes for squares. But, it may be asked, will mathematics and the mind's philosophy of itself, continue to exist or to engage thought ? As well ask, will God continue to be ? Triangles and circles change not with time, as they do not begin with time. We draw our diagrams, but who created the doctrines, the properties which they represent ? The mind must still retain its conceptions of duration and space ; it must move between its poles and meridian lines ; otherwise it has lost its identity, its past, its future, and cannot rise to the idea of God, who

184 *MINISTRY REWARDED BY HIGHER MINISTRY.*

reveals Himself in the prophecies of duration and extension. Nor can the soul when brought into the tides of infinite Being, cease to let down the line into itself. Its individuality is in no sense swallowed up in God ; on the contrary, it is brought into the play of perfect liberty. Thus intellectual activity is the condition of consciousness ; thus too, the perception of identity and the conception of God involve the framework of a science which we are little accustomed to associate with heaven. It would be easy to show that history becomes a sacred scripture, only intelligible when its canon is complete ; that those who make it, know least of its significance ; that in the persons of the redeemed it passes on to the future, where its two ends meet, and where one band girds its golden sheaf. It would not be hard to show how all that is true in science or art, all that has been created by God in a primary, or by genius in a secondary sense, must flow in upon the future like a mill-race and drive the wheels of thought. But I pass on.

On all hands it is admitted and hoped that in the future, spiritual life will widen in scope and deepen in energy. The affections of gratitude, joy, and love will move through the soul with stronger currents. Even peace will have the movement of a river. Faith and hope are no less immortal, according to Paul, than love, and these will stir

along the soul with mightier energy of inspiration : for the blessed state is life—life without dream, lethargy, or death. Life so profound must have wider vents than psalms and contemplation. Moreover, likeness to Christ is the goal to which faith is ever bending. But do we fully consider who Christ is ? Do we remember that conformity to Him is assimilation to One in whose life there has been no sabbath ? “ My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” Are the redeemed to lie like sand on the shore, while Christ the sea of being pulses on for ever ? Between Christ and any inactive being the gulf is vast. The soul that merely reposes, lies dead and dry above the water-mark of Christ’s joy and fellowship. As far as we know, inactivity and rest cancel each other. The men who endure hardness, and not the monks, are deepest in God’s rest. There may be inertia in a state where sin is working out its issues, but surely not in a society where souls live and move and are in God. It is a mean view of God that presents Him as passing into a Sabbath state after the last judgment. It rests on two assumptions: first, that the end of our little world is the close of all ; and, second, that inaction is the normal state of the Infinite. The statement of these assumptions is their refutation.

When we come to consult the Sacred Writings,

we find that they know nothing of an indolent paradise. The fourth chapter of Hebrews is generally pointed to as sanctioning the idea that the redeemed observe a kind of Hebrew Sabbath. But what the writer teaches there is, that the people of God rest only as God has rested since the creation of the world. "He that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from His." He enters the condition of God's rest. But "God's rest is not a rest necessitated by fatigue, nor conditioned by idleness; but it is in fact the very continuance in that upholding and governing of which the creation was the beginning." It is in this sense that the dead who die in the Lord rest from their labours. John, who flew nearest the light and gazed with eagle eye on the glorious army, employs the strongest language to set forth the intensity of their service: "Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple." Yet these are the blessed who rest from their labours. Then, as if to break down any ground that might be left for reducing heaven to an ecstatic vision, the seer joins sight and ministry: "His servants shall serve him, and they shall see his face." The four living beings, many winged and eyed, who surround the throne and who have no rest by day and by night, gather into themselves the spirit of the glorified

society. The mental and spiritual powers burn with countless eyes, and are clothed with wings ; they drink in the light at all points, and are shaped for swiftest flight. Even on earth the spiritual man feels that beneath the armour of the outward nature, there is a growth of wings, a daily opening of eyes within, until the whole body is full of light. He feels the ardent thirst to gaze around the whole circle of being and of truth. Within his breast, there is the stir of wings clamouring for vent to fly on God's service day and night. It seems to me that the new spiritual body will gird the soul as it were with wing power : that we who laboured round our little circle on foot, shall move to the demands of widened stewardship as on wings.

3. In the next place, the faithful servants enter into profounder blessedness. In "the joy of thy Lord," is there an underlying allusion to a festival, or does the parable at this point pass into reality ? Those who accept the former view explain the passage thus : The Lord on His return from the foreign country prepares a banquet, to which His faithful servants are invited. The hall is filled with light, music, and mirth ; the servant enters into the fellowship of his Master's joy. In short, whatever the meaning of the words, the figure is that of a Jewish feast. This interpretation has the merit of consistency, inasmuch as it prevents the

188 MINISTRY REWARDED BY HIGHER MINISTRY.

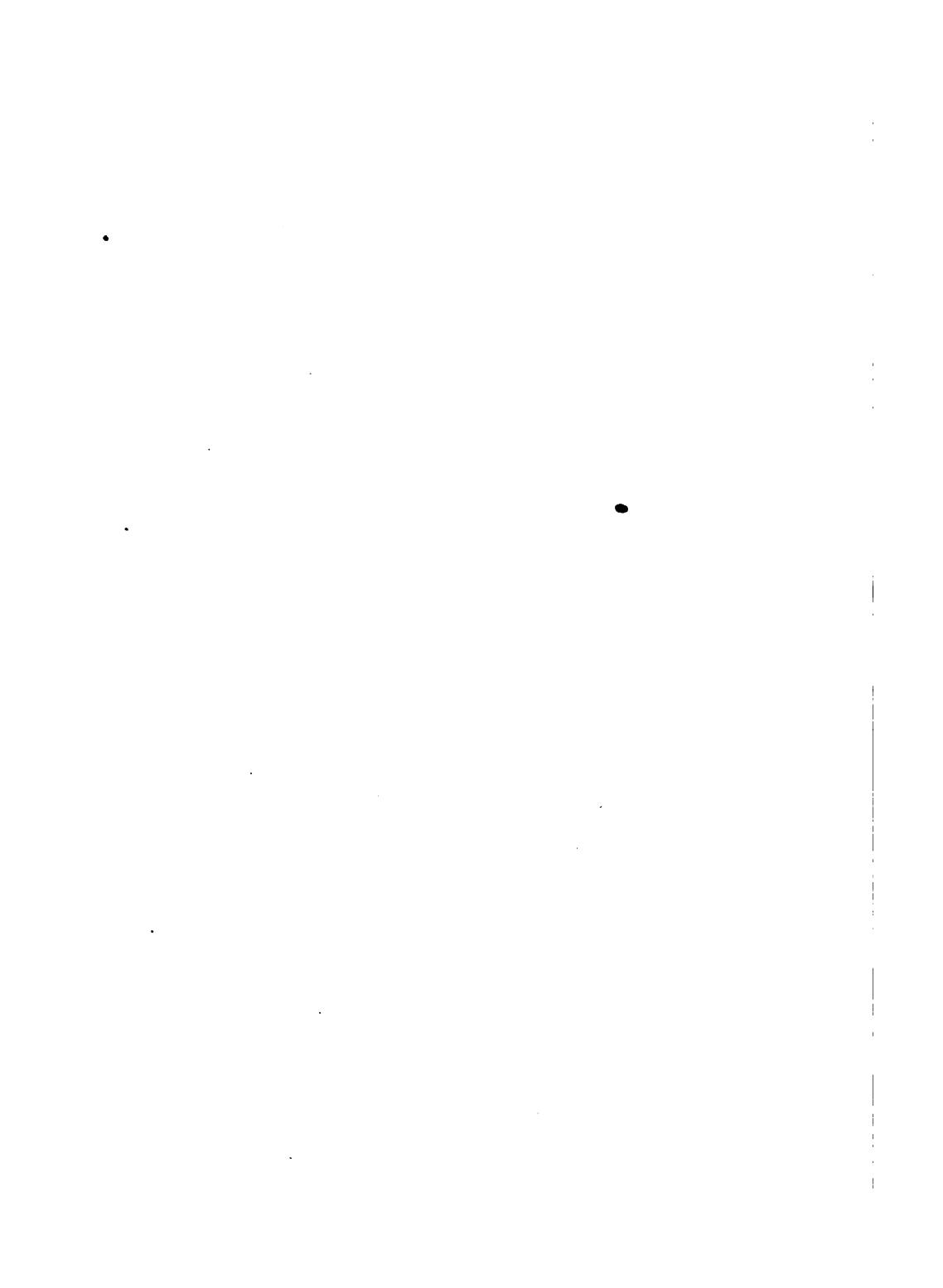
parabolic from passing into the literal. But it shifts *χαρά*, joy, from its New Testament use. On the lips of our Lord and His Apostles, *χαρά* is a white-robed, sacred word, dedicated to the altar of feeling, and gathering into itself the soul's inmost, deepest life. With Christ it is always *subjective*, leading down to the springs of living, passionate rapture. We are, therefore, not at liberty to understand it here in the purely objective sense of banquet, unless by banquet we mean a condition, the festival of being. Much less can we regard it as referring to any millennial repose. The parable, as we have seen, sweeps like a torrent through all hopes of personal reign. The servants are entering into life eternal, into the light and joy of the heavenly state. As all the colours, when blended, sink their individuality and burn into a beam of light, so joy contains and knits into unity all moods, aspects, and phases of the heavenly experience. The unity of blessedness underlies the "octave of beatitudes." To enter the joy of the Lord is to be tuned into the chime and rhythm of God's nature, to be in the eternal fellowship and sacrament of infinite Being, lifted into the bosom of Trinity as it were—"that they also may be one in us." Believers on earth are not strangers to joy; the joy of the Lord is their strength. In their fellowship of suffering with Christ, they have a

communion of gladness, a spring issuing from the root of the cross. "Ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full, and your joy no man taketh from you ; these things have I spoken unto you that My joy might remain in you." Joy walks thorn-crowned through the world. She is the angel of the desert and of Gethsemane. She spreads her passover in every pure heart. The servants have fought in her strength and calm ; they have proved the existence of a kingdom of joy by its attractions, by the drift of its currents. Still, it has been an experience, a hope, a shore lying behind the mist. In the soul's higher moments it has felt doors fly open into light and God, and as speedily close again. There was no entrance. Now, the good and faithful cross the threshold, pass into the world of profounder feeling, to live and move in God like His thoughts. They enter the land of the awakened. The sleep, the heavy dream of earth is past. Individual being is widened, quickened, deepened. The angel man steps out of his rent, mortal shell, into the life and joy of God the Spirit. One pulse of health and life flows through his trinity of natures ; the joys of his body become the joys of his soul. A body concealing no seeds of death, a mind in which no power sleeps, a spirit winged in all its attributes, a rhythm of threefold life, a dear sacrament and

fellowship of natures, once clashing in fierce antagonism ! Thus the whole man is a living psalm of burning lines, deep in the harmonies of holiness, love and life. The jar, the blackness, the dread, the pangs of guilt, are of the past. The pains of coming to spiritual consciousness are over ; and the nature in all its depths is open to the light. O this festival of profound, living sensibility, of being, redeemed, radiant, and lifted into the spring of abiding youth ! At this point a new flash of light passes through the words, “ I am the resurrection and the life.” Are not such beings many-eyed, drawing into themselves as inheritance the new heavens and new earth, feeding mind on un-created Mind, and looking on Spirit with the gaze of spirit ? They see the altar of the cross on all sides.

The assembly of the good and faithful may be justly likened to a banquet. It is the glad reunion of a sublime brotherhood. For the first time *society* is realised. The soul’s manifold hungers are fed. The labourers, the soldiers, the witnesses have met. The band of communion girds the harvest sheaf of Christ’s travail and passion. There is profoundest music of soul, for individuality has ripened. How mighty are love and joy to open souls into their respective types ! How mighty to harmonise ! In this feast the guests are face to

face with each other and with the Lord. It is the marriage-supper of the Lamb, the presentation of the glorious Church to the glorified Christ. Here is the joy which He set before Him, and for which He endured the cross. "He loved the Church and gave Himself for it," and this love feeds all the roots of the blessed life. Our life here is but a rehearsal, then. The inspirations of our higher moments are true,—the inspirations that tell us of doors around us opening into deeper life and higher moods of being; that fill us with the consciousness of moving, hungry, thirsty, sad, before the gates of a festal state. Let us hold fast our confidence. The doors will open yet, and whether in the desert or in Gethsemane, if found faithful, we shall hear the welcome, Enter into the joy of thy Lord.



IX.

**MAN'S POWER TO INTERPRET THE
SPIRITUAL COINCIDENT WITH
HIS MORAL LIFE.**

MATT. XXV. 24, 25.

THEN HE WHO HAD RECEIVED THE ONE TALENT CAME
AND SAID, LORD, I KNEW THEE THAT THOU ART
AN HARD MAN, REAPING WHERE THOU HAST NOT
SOWN, AND GATHERING WHERE THOU HAST NOT
STRAWED : AND I WAS AFRAID, AND WENT AND HID
THY TALENT IN THE EARTH : LO, THERE THOU
HAST THAT IS THINE.

IX.

MAN'S POWER TO INTERPRET THE SPIRITUAL COINCIDENT WITH HIS MORAL LIFE.

THIS is the evil servant's estimate of his Lord. It is one of those instances wherein men unconsciously draw the outline of their character, wherein their conception of another is the measure of themselves. We invest others with our own attributes; all things of which we think must pass through the mint of our personality, and wear our own image and superscription. Every heart creates its own world. Hence the majority of lives are a melancholy romance. The outward is unnatural, because the inward is unreal. As long as man is a caricature of man, his world will be a caricature of the truth; and the difference between what he sees and what is, will be the measure of his surprise when the truth is revealed by the interpreter Death. The unfaithful servant does

not bring this accusation against his Lord to extenuate his guilt. He gives voice to such convictions as are within him. He is a man of opinions, not of experience. The hard Master has existed in his thought if nowhere else. This part of the parable crashes down with all its weight on the tendency of our time. We are beginning to shape our faiths out of our subjective life—to create a deity from our consciousness. We are in the drift of opinion. The age of blank atheism is past. A profounder study of the finite has rendered it impossible to deny the Infinite. A God is generally admitted ; but only such a God as harmonizes with the God-conception within. The history of modern thought is the history of theology. We are now old enough to see that all the springs of the thinker are in God. Poetry, philosophy, and history, weary of moving around the shores of truth, are endeavouring to strike out for the depths. They no longer tack about to escape the Supreme. They invoke Him as a muse, and assign Him a place as a quantity necessary to the rhythm of nature and of thought. Mental and physical science begin alike to feel that they travel along radii converging in central Mind. But while the battle has cooled around the question of God's being, it has broken out with fierce heat at another point, namely, on the field of relationship

between man and God. Those who look beneath the surface, see clearly enough that the real battle of our day is between philosophic theism and Christianity. Religion and irreligion are no longer in the lists. It is religion against religion—the notional against the revealed. May not the field be swept clear of revelation and of Christ, and man be thrown back on his own consciousness for the feeding springs of the religious life? May not every man think out God for himself? In short, are not revelation and Christ uncalled for, since there can be no human soul without the God-sense?

This movement of religious thought first manifested itself in connection with human creeds; having burnt down dogma in the fires of free inquiry, it gathered its ardour around the inspired Word. Like all forces destructive of the Church's faith, it was bred between the plates of the Church's armour—her formulated creeds. In many cases the creeds clashed against the moral sense in proportion as it was strong and clear. They had thus to give way to the pressure of conscience and conviction. Their weakness, by a natural sequence, was transferred from them to the source from whence they professed to be drawn. The subjective having once conquered the objective, went forward to assail the positive foundations of Christian faith. Thus the Truth, designed to be

198 MAN'S POWER TO INTERPRET THE SPIRITUAL

a refiner's fire in man, is thrown into the fire to be refined. The bold, clear outlines of revelation are overlaid with the hues of opinion. The conscience of the Sanhedrim is employed as a counter on which to ring the mintage of Moses and Christ. Divine freedom, creative power, miracle and sacrifice are discussed as if they had never been manifested in a human life. German workshops ring with chisels digging off the angles of inspired truth. Christ is resolved into a dream floating through the sanguine brain of Judaism. God is either a helpless Idea shot into eternal exile, or shut down under the laws of the worlds, and awaking to consciousness in human thought.

When the torrent of opinion flows with new velocity, wise men expect it to widen its channel. That much has perished of late years is but another form of saying that much has been born. The thought that seethes around spiritual questions and eats into old faiths, is troubled by an angel. Nevertheless, the ardent tendency to melt down the die-struck doctrines of Christianity to the plastic consistence of opinion, is subversive of all faith. When men begin to seek the Infinite through the approaches of the subjective, they tread in the steps of the unfaithful servant. When they assert that doctrine is nothing, they smite faith on the brain. Society and religion have no greater enemy than

the strong-brained Rabbi who sets adrift on the sea of speculation, boulder after boulder from the doctrinal foundation upon which Christian society has stood. Revelation is in the confluence of two angry currents of opinion ; one assailing it because it is objective and positive ; the other, as being merely a rendering of the soul's subjective life—a sheaf gathered from the field of conscience. We may reject part or all, since our conception of God but slightly shapes our character and life. We may re-cast or reject the Sacred Writings, since we possess the organ which gives Bibles birth. The history of the evil servant reads a lesson here. These two truths stand out in painful relief—first, that a man's conception of God can never rise above the pitch of his subjective life ; and, second, that character, outward life and service are determined by the light in which God is held. With reference to the first point, we see in the third servant the water-mark of man's power to interpret the Almighty, and that it is coincident with his moral life. There we have a man drifting about on a sea of unreality, shaping a deity out of his own attributes. The distance between his God and the God of revelation is infinite. He is held in the grasp of an icy Theism, which, like an Alpine summit, freezes as it ascends. To him, God is only incarnate in humanity or in the universe, through which He flows, a torrent of

remorseless law. The servant makes a fatal mistake. He shifts life from off its basis ; he wastes in the desert of sterile error. The point he reaches is low, yet it is as high as unaided mind can reach. In the search after God, the intellect must hew the stair-steps out of its own life. Being distinct from the moral, its inductions are also distinct. Thinking of itself, it thinks the infinite and eternal. It reports duration, extension, and power ; but as the hard man is not Christ, so eternity, infinity, and strength are not God. Moral attributes lie beyond the intellectual range, and glass themselves in the pure heart alone. The seer rises on no chain-ladder of thought ; his vision is a gaze of being into Being, and has for its condition, holiness. Holy men alone were moved by the Holy Ghost. When we assume that humanity, in the absence of Revelation, can rise to the knowledge of the true God, we either forget that the eye of spirit is wasted in the fall, or take for granted that an intellectual perception is all that is requisite. If it be said that God is inwoven with our nature, that His moral attributes are legible there, I reply, we are left alone with conscience crying in the wilderness. A moral sense and moral perfection are deeply separated. In the case of the evil servant, we behold conscience living side by side with the profoundest misconception of God. Conscience can

only sweep the space between its negative and its positive pole. So far from being character; it burns with intensest energy where character is lost. Like Moses' law, its eyes are ever turned inward on man with searching glare. Its gaze is quick and powerful and sharper than any other two-edged sword ; it is the voice but not the face of God. Its very loneliness is oppressive : like a general whose whole army has been slain, it stands alone in the field, giving the word of command to dead men ; from the ruin of the soul's life and attributes, it comes up eternally crying, "I only am escaped alone to tell thee." This Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted because they are not, this moral sense, stripped of its surroundings, is but a broken tradition of the true God. In its paralysis it is not able to withstand the expression of hardness that settles down on the face of the world's government. Even in its vigour, it is blind to love—the Divine essence, and speaks in the tone and accent of law : the highest point it can reach is to be a law unto itself, accusing or excusing. But as the main drift of the man's life is towards wrong, and as the moral sense is therefore perpetually issuing its writ of condemnation, the conviction of justice gives way to that of injustice ; the rod of terror swallows the sceptre of righteousness ; and the very thought of God, like winds blowing

off fields of ice, fills the soul with freezing shiver. The flash of terror shooting through the heart, leaves behind the feeling of austerity ; the voice of Sinai drowns the Beatitudes. Every time the conscience warns in vain it wastes its power. Like street criers who reduce their voice to a monotone, it loses its modulations ; it forgets the language of approval, and gathers its strength into a reiterated peal of condemnation. As it decreases in energy and fails to turn its light alternately on right and wrong, the existence of eternal justice becomes problematic, and transgression is stripped of its guilt. The heart will then hide its talents with few stings, and will calmly spread a banquet for the flesh or intellect on the tomb of the spirit. When once the soul settles into this mood, it can only view God as exacting and unjust ; it sees Him reaping where He has not sown, and gathering where He has not strawed. It feels aggrieved if held accountable for interest : it looks for no reward, and protests against all penalty. It regards God as thrusting Himself into affairs with which He has no concern, as invading the field of human rights with arbitrary exactions. Religion becomes an insult, and truth a spy, seeking to impose a tax on liberty. Conscience having resigned its functions, the soul keeps jealous guard against encroachment from

the spiritual side. The fever of fear shoots its alternate heat and chill, but the moral sense is off its balance, and petrified feelings can discern nothing but a hard man.

This is the exact attitude of the evil servant. The witness that vindicated the Divine procedure is in its grave ; the soul's icy breath freezes all over which it passes ; the light within is darkness, and how great is that darkness ! But here I must interrupt myself, in order to ascertain the true meaning of the words in which the servant prefers his charge. He expresses his conception of his Lord's character, first in general terms, and then in words more intense and particular. The adjective hard—*skleros*—draws the outline of a being of selfish greed, while the clause, "reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed," defines the mode in which this grasping avarice exerts itself. This clause looks out of its setting in the parable, with a proverbial aspect, as if our Lord had found it cut and shaped to hand by common use. Indeed, two proverbs, expressing the same thought with different degrees of energy, seem to be united. To avoid apparent tautology, some understand *dieskorpisas*—strawed—to refer to winnowing corn as opposed to sowing seed. But the figure would thus have no meaning. In winnowing corn, it is not the wheat but the chaff that is scattered ;

and as that alone is gathered which has been scattered, the servant represents his Lord as raking together chaff and straw. But it is surely a mild charge, to say that a man gathers chaff where he has not scattered it; or to put it in the words of Trench, "Gathers with the rake where others have winnowed with the fan." That this is not the meaning, Trench himself seems to feel: for while he speaks of gathering with the rake where others have winnowed with the fan, he adds that "strawed" refers "to the scattering of the chaff from the floor, that the *wheat* purged from this might be gathered into the barn." But the wheat was not scattered, and had it been, it could not be gathered with the rake. Moreover, the accusation would lose in point and energy if it descended from reaping where others had sown, to gathering into the barn, wheat winnowed by others. The gathering depends on the scattering abroad; and the servant's charge against his Master is, that He exacts results from lives barren of cause. The words "sowed" and "strawed" both refer to the bestowal of enabling cause; while "reap" and "gather" imply the garnering of consequence or life-fruit. But to 'sow' is more restricted than to 'strew'; it has reference to the scattering of seed within the limits of a field, while the latter term expresses a wider and more prodigal dispersion, as when, in the parable

of the sower, some seed fell by the way-side, some on stony places, some among thorns, and some on good ground. It is hard enough when the husbandman comes in harvest time to reap the field which he has not sown, even though that field possess a fruitful soil ; but the rigour deepens when he demands indiscriminate return where both conditions of fruitfulness were wanting—seed and soil. Thus, the servant steers his objection into the teeth of divine testimony. Christ in His first parable sketches the sower passing amid a drift of seed over all varieties of soil, knowing no boundary lines, whitening with a germ-shower the entire field. He reveals the Son of Man moving with the supernatural through man in all his phases and conditions. He lays bare the subjective life of men —beaten into roads, exhausted in thorn-growths, swept bare of feeling and capacity as a stony cause-way. He broadly asserts the law of spiritual waste ; that the divine falls and dies like wheat on rocky beds. God sows where He never reaps, and scatters abroad where He does not gather. But how can the foot-baked path and the stony ground know that spring and the sower are passing over them, and that the seed of the kingdom is falling upon them ? They only feel the economy of *frost*, whose rude handling penetrates, seams and rends them. In like manner, when the soul's life is

exposed, hard and beaten as a street, or when it has run its energies into harvests of passion, or resisted the ministry of life—it freezes like beaten earth in proportion to its hardness; it can only see the severer aspect of God's government; it has neither spring nor summer; it shivers in the chill rigour of winter. Like ice-fields floating in their cold air-currents, through warm latitudes, it is ever in its own hard atmosphere, surcharging the outward with the inward, knowing nothing of direct approach to God, judging of love and sacrifice as they come filtrated through an atmosphere of selfishness.

When this point is reached, when the conscience has become a stony ground, and can no longer cover the roots of the spiritual, faith in *man* disappears. The isolated soul sees in society an organized deception, is afraid, and goes and hides its talent in the earth. To it, Christian enthusiasm and sacrifice are but masks, beneath which a selfish motive lurks. It lives on the frigid prose of suspicion, estranged from all the epic fire of trust and love. It is in this direction indeed that the hard spirit stands out in grim relief, and glares across our path every day. There are men who have no regard for their race, no love, no pity. Having within no conscience talking of truth, no flash of higher light, no just conception of God, they have no conviction

of man's greatness, no sympathy with his sorrows, no love for his soul, no sacrifice for his redemption. Self-sacrifice, endurance, suffering are mere waste ; love cannot break her alabaster flask without encountering calculating censure. The spikenard of martyrs' blood flows to no purpose. "Blessed are the pure in heart for they see God ;" Blessed are the pure in heart for they see man. Their eye of light discovers within him the warm radiance of the Divine Nature, and finds in his spirit a break-water against doubt. Love, as it gazes into man, exclaims surely God is here ! Here is a fifth gospel, sadly mutilated ; here is a being worth dying for ! But when conscience is wasted, a man looks out on his fellows as so many worthless pebbles grinding each other in a greedy sea. He is hard, every man is hard, God is hard. Society, history, science, echo his own sentiment ; for the soul in disease, like birds in training, gleans out of the melody the one jarring note ; the economy of the world grates harshly along its shattered nerves.

With this frame of soul is ever coupled a positive self-assurance, positive alike in assertion and denial : — "Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man." There is here a sad instance of the strong delusion that believes a lie. The servant is unconscious that he is looking on his projected self, and that as far as he is concerned, the real Lord is not there.

He knows not that he does not know—he doubts all but his doubt. Having adopted a conclusion without foundation, he holds it without examination. The denial of his creed would have been more meritorious than its acceptance. In affirming his Lord's unrighteousness, he practically denies His existence. The negation of truth is the negation of God. This mental sloth that accepts a mortal fallacy, with the means of disproof at hand, is worse than the doubt that refuses trust till it has discovered a ground of trust. Doubt is honest while it continues to inquire, guilty when it is content to doubt.

We may see here, as elsewhere, that men who are destitute of spiritual insight, carry most dogmatism into the field of spiritual truth. Minds, like freezing water, stiffen in proportion as they are stagnant. Arrogance is the attribute of ignorance. This servant was probably an apostle of orthodoxy, a fuller of the worn-out garments of theology; one who had great faith in "much water," while he had none in God. He emasculated Christianity of its mysteries, left no scope for faith or diversity of opinion. He was of the race of persecutors and creed-makers, his type never becomes extinct; it survives in the modern prophet, who destitute of spiritual light, pronounces judgment on spiritual truths, and who adjusts Christ's claims without

having made His acquaintance. Bad poets and worse philosophers run into theology as a jungle where they may hide their head. If they have been wrecked in physics or metaphysics, they can at least find sea-room in the spiritual. And the law of common sense, which in the commerce of life demands for every calling a certain aptitude, is here set aside. A man who did not know a triangle from a square would hardly be chosen as a professor of mathematics; yet it not seldom happens that crowds accept the opinions of men who know absolutely nothing of the subjects on which they dogmatize, who courageously avow that their claim on public attention consists in the fact that they approach the questions as unprejudiced strangers. It is as if the wicked servant had become a professor of theology, or had undertaken to supply the world with the fourth Gospel.

It is the life barren of spiritual capacity and action that lays claim to knowledge. Alike in the parable and in real life, religion has on her side character and faculty; while the revolt against the divine administration is initiated in the imbecility of wasted energy. The men who draw the sword against religion are men with part of them in the grave, and that the part to which religion alone appeals. They magnify knowledge, and assure us that if they knew less they would believe more.

210 MAN'S POWER TO INTERPRET THE SPIRITUAL

Confronting the infinite they say, 'We know thee.' They sometimes speak of having outgrown their faith, which merely hung like a haze of glory around their dawn of being. They insinuate that the Race will cast off religion as it cuts its wisdom teeth ; and I am afraid that some of them identify negation and assumption with genius. Now it is certain that they cannot have rejected Christ on the ground of knowledge, for they admit that they have outlived the faculty which apprehends spiritual truth ; and if they bring the natural to the contemplation of the supernatural, they only convict themselves of profounder ignorance. Nothing can be more unfounded than their assumption that intellectual knowledge is the highest and indeed only knowledge. Are they not daily reminded of the fact—by any line of inquiry along which they may choose to travel —that knowledge in proportion to its depths throws the inquirer back on his moral instincts ? Beneath phenomena is law, behind law is mind, and beyond mind character. That man is not in the highest range of faculty, and hence not in the deepest secrets of knowledge, who has put out the eye that sees God. As historian, philosopher, or man of science, he is ever fencing off his pursuits from that element which alone can constitute them living and organic. But this by the way.

I cannot pass from this part of the subject with-

out noticing what appears to me to be a thought growing naturally out of it; namely, that all attempts at putting God in definitions are beset by the gravest peril. On this point the history of religious thought speaks with great emphasis, and fully shows that the efforts to reduce God to words are at cross purposes with the law under which the Word became flesh. One of the worst scourges that have swept over the Christian Church, has been the tendency to forget that God once for all uttered His own definition in the humanity of His Son; and to present instead of Christ, a Deity conjugated through the moods and tenses of intellect. I know of no instance in which this tendency has manifested itself without coming under the charge of hardness and incompleteness. Take for example the answer of the Assembly's Catechism to the question What is God?—"God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth." Now I have no hesitation in affirming that this is not the God who was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. Suppose a child to have learned this definition before he has heard or read a word of Scripture; he will be startled when he comes to hear John declare, that God is *love*. He will perceive that what the Apostle assigns as the Divine essence, is not so much as noticed in the Catechism's definition. Certainly

the answer fails to raise the conception of God which we get at Gethsemane and Calvary ; and one cannot but ask, Did not Plato say all this before ? If revelation is light on the face of God, Christ is the Light within that light. As I have endeavoured to show the necessity of a revelation in order to a just conception of God, I may here say that a revelation in words is partial, and even weak, and waits to be revealed by being embodied in a life. In the evil servant we witness a man contemplating God out of Christ, and mistaking Moses for the Father of mercies ; laying emphasis on only one side of the divine procedure ; moving along the icy line of law ; having for shekinah and God the chill proposition "Thou art an hard man;" yet the servant but carries into their legitimate issue the doctrines of a certain school of theology. Like that school, he shapes his system of belief irrespective of the facts of the case. In our Lord's censure of the wicked man's accusation, He condemns every conception of God's character and action that may be justly charged with hardness. The view according to which God reaps where He has not sown, and gathers where He has not strawed, is expressly adduced by Christ as a libel against the truth. Now it appears to me that the doctrine which presents the Redeemer's death as for none but a certain number chosen out of the race, coupled, as that

doctrine usually is, with the universality of human responsibility—cannot by any play of dialectics be rescued from the charge of hardness. If God the Father unconditionally chose a certain number of men, and gave them to His Son, and if Christ died for these and these alone, and if the death of Christ is the sole ground of salvation and eternal life—then it is only as far as this selected number is concerned, that God can be said to reap where He has sown and gather where He has strawed. For when we approach the other side of the doctrine, we see those who were not given by the Father to the Son ; those for whom Christ made no atonement, and whose salvation is impossible—condemned for not being saved. Now let it be remembered that the advocates of this conception of Christ's sacrifice, hold the doctrine of human responsibility. So that a man whom God did not love is judged for slighting God's love ; a man for whom Christ did not die is condemned for rejecting Christ's death ; a man is cast out for lack of holiness, when the one enabling cause of righteousness was of purpose held out of his reach. It is the custom to throw over the ugly features of this dogma a thin deception, to the effect that the lost are condemned on the ground of unbelief. But what ground is there for faith, in the case of those for whom God has made no provision in His economy of grace ? Are they to

believe that God has loved and chosen them ? that Christ has borne their sin, satisfied the claims of justice on their account, and brought in an everlasting righteousness for them ? It will only weaken the case, to hide in the fiction that men do not know whether they are among the chosen, the bought with a price or not, and are therefore held accountable for their faith. It is surely a lame conception of Christian redemption which leaves men in doubt whether, as far as they are concerned, salvation is possible. A redemption, on the acceptance or rejection of which every man is saved or lost, ought at least to manifest its *existence* to everyone. The essence of faith lies in the soul's grasp of the great fact that Christ died for it,— “Who loved me and gave Himself for me.” But if the condition which alone renders faith possible, be absent from any man in the world, it is hard to see how that man can be condemned for unbelief. Had he believed in God's love to him or in Christ's sacrifice for his sin, he would have believed a lie. In such a case, however, faith can have no place, for as Christ's sacrifice for the chosen includes and ensures belief in that sacrifice, so those who have been excluded from participation in the atonement are also shut out from faith. I can understand how sovereignty may, in distributing its bounties, give more to one than to another, having regard to

the great law that "unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required," and that to whom little is given, of him shall little be required. But I cannot understand the morality of the sovereignty that exacts equal results where there is enabling cause, and where cause is totally absent—absent not accidentally, but according to purpose. Then, the difference no longer lies between two talents and one, or five and two: but between grace and no grace, power to become the sons of God, and the absence of power to become the sons of God. According to this theory, God requires the same fruit of character in the elect and non-elect. He requires faith, repentance, love, hope, holiness—in short, conformity to the image of His Son. This result is possible and necessary in the case of all for whom Christ died; flows as consequence from the Redeemer's sacrifice, and is possible only on the ground of that sacrifice. Yet God requires faith, repentance, hope, love, holiness, from those for whom there is no atonement and no Christ; that is, He demands a consequence where He has withheld the cause. John declares, "We love Him because He first loved us;" but how can the non-elect love God, when the love of God cannot be *revealed* to them, simply because as far as they are concerned it does not exist. This immorality would not be tolerated among *men* for

a day; man's moral instincts would consume it in their fires. All tyranny and injustice, all hardness, all reaping without sowing and gathering without scattering abroad, of which we have read or heard, is righteousness compared with the morality here ascribed to *God*. For let it be remembered that eternal pain is the penalty attached to the missing of a salvation, which for those who come short of it, never existed.

I have said that the disciples of this school frame their system apart from the light of facts. As the evil servant's charge of injustice is in violation of open truth, so is this doctrine shaped on the anvil of casuistry, that it may be a foundation to another doctrine which has no foundation of its own. It is first assumed that Christ's sacrifice was an offering to divine justice of so much penal suffering for so much liability to suffering on the sinner's part. Christ having thus evened the scale of justice by bearing the punishment due to men for sin, God, it is argued, cannot in justice exact punishment for sin twice; if the Redeemer penally bore the sinner's guilt, then the sinner, on the principle of equity, is free from the penalty of that guilt. But as some men are lost, and suffer the punishment of their sin, therefore Christ could neither have borne their sin nor its penalty. And as God is bound to punish guilt wherever found, He must commit to penal fire

those who are in evil, irrespective of the fact that on their behalf He provided no escape from sin. Thus the fiction of a partial propitiation for sin, grows out of another fiction, namely, that the essence of the Christian atonement is the offering of an equivalent of suffering to the claims of justice. The doctrine, instead of taking shape among the facts of the case, is framed on another field and under the pressure of a system. To escape injustice on one side it falls into injustice on another,—outraging not only the Gospel witness, but the profoundest intuition of God in the human breast.

And this leads me to the second point ;—that character, life, and action, are shaped by our conception of God. Let us clear our minds of the fallacy daily gaining ground, that the light in which we view God has little or no connection with our life. God is the premiss from which, consciously or unconsciously, we are ever travelling on to conclusions. In the case of the atheist, this truth appears in its exaggerated form. Starting with the negation of the Divine existence, the atheist proceeds to deny his own higher being, and to reduce himself to an unrelated, intellectual unit. From negation of being he moves to negation of character ; that is of faith, love, justice, righteousness. If all men began at the same point, the inevitable result would be to blot out the absolute, the positive, in

short, society. The atheist is of necessity a dissolvent in society ; acknowledging no Absolute Spirit, he can accept no related spirit, but must work along the tissues of organic life as a decomposing ministry ; resolving it into its constituent parts with an analysis of death. And this of necessity, inasmuch as he mistakes the phenomenal for the essential, and the essential for the phenomenal. Accepting no eternal Mind, he is ever pulling the pillars out of the temple of design : for the same reason he strikes the key-stone out of the arch of morality. Hence he is an analyst ; he destroys cohesion, relation, unity. He is unfit for rule, for statesmanship, and for the ministry of private citizenship. For the man who can only discern in human society a wave of fate surcharged with thinking atoms, cannot perceive and seize those fixed principles which underlie individual and social life. And as Atheism lacks the heat and stroke that clench the links of the social chain, so it is debarred from literary creation. It can act on literature like fire on lime ; it can burn away the tissues of history, and reduce philosophy to a valley of dry bones ; but its creations want breath : failing of divinity, they fail of humanity ; not being conditioned in God, they have no place in history. Men know that a creature without the capacity for God, is no more a man than a building without door or window is a house.

Theism seems a great advance on Atheism, and so it is, in an intellectual point of view. It lifts the mind and moral sense out of the plane of the fool, who can find no God even in his heart. But our faith in the sufficiency of Theism will be shaken, if we but consider that the evil servant was at least a Theist. If the recognition of a personal God moving through all as final cause, can lift the soul into its lost heritage of character, and key it to the harmonies of the Divine Nature, then the wicked servant is no longer wicked. If even the faith that generates fear, girding the soul with bars of heated steel, cannot drive the soul along God's paths, like pulse-tides coursing in their veins,—Theism may give up its claims to re-shape the spirit and the life. The man who said, "I was afraid," looked towards a future, expected a reckoning and feared the Judge. The Theist cannot even rise so high; he has the disadvantage of consuming the marrow of occasion and energy, in ever laying the corner stone of *being*. Where true religion takes its start he ends; what to it is not a point of faith at all, is his sole creed. Content with the response that God exists, he settles down in the fallacy that existence is life. When it can only be said of God that He is, the divine power in human life is easily calculated. The belief that begins and ends with God's being, stands in the same relation to true religion

as a son's belief in his father's existence, to filial piety. Theism, thin and pale, with its icy ray of light, lacks the life, the heat and ardour that create souls afresh. Its God is but a sublime Idea, or a deep, chill firmament of passive qualities which exercise less sovereignty over the world than the remotest star. It leaves us to struggle in the vortex and whirl of godless laws;—by law we are pressed at all points; law is our ministering angel; we are insphered in law like ships in polar ice; and our groans and cries are waste of breath, for between us and God comes in the frozen immobility of Nature. If Pantheism plunges God into the abyss of Nature, Theism creates an abyss between Him and Nature. To cross the one gulf is as hard as to emerge from the other. Theism in harvest is like Theism in spring. Seeing beyond the yearning current of law nothing but a pale ray of existence, it ripens not the human soul, but leaves it in its infant blade, unformed and colourless. The feeling of distance creeps along the soul like polar night. Prayer freezes in his throat, who has to cry across a waste of planetary sand to God. Faith never deepens into the hue of faith; for it is light that carries within it all the dyes. The Theist's trust fathers no movement towards God, it cannot break the shell of self to give the angel birth. With an idea for God, the Theist's religion never

passes beyond idea ; it never walks sovereign as a sun through the world, driving on the pulse of growth and higher life. From a God so passive and remote, nothing can be hoped ; He reaches down no warm Father's hand through the chill eternity of law ; He shoots no woof-thread of spirit and higher law across the warp of the world's forces. He works no miracle ; opens no avenue through circumstance for man ; lines no event with wise and loving adaptation ; works no armour for the soul to turn the edge of battle ; but sits grim and calm, and only notes the worlds as so many glow-worms trailing through the dark. Such language as, "God is the strength of my heart," "the Lord is my shepherd," "I am continually with thee," "in Him we live and move and have our being," is clearly out of place here. The Theistic God cannot draw men unto him, nor can men draw him unto them. The yearnings of the soul remain unfed, they refuse to worship an idea, they sob themselves asleep at last ; it is the sleep of death. Theism can never lay great motives underneath the soul, nor keep alive the fires of conscience, nor point the agonies of repentance. It has no matrix for the new creature, no cleansing fire, no altar for the immolation of self. It cannot stoop warm-breasted on the soul's unwinged yearnings, crying in them with a parent's voice and feeding them with the

MAN'S POWER TO INTERPRET THE SPIRITUAL

heat of a kindred life. Has it the salt-energy that preserves society from corruption? Has it power to conquer human passions and shape men into brotherhood? Can its frozen gleam so act on souls that they burn with shining light? Where are its Gethsemanes and Golgothas, its saints, its missionaries, its martyrs? Accepting no sacrifice on God's part, it makes none on man's. Love for humanity has its root in the love of God. The religion that yearns for and attempts the salvation of man, must be painfully conscious that he is in a fallen lot; that God in love has come near to restore the lost union, and that hence the world is warm with the light of hope. For while the world revolves around an infinite Idea, and man is left to waste unfathered in the grip of law,—love, enthusiasm and sacrifice can have no place. Our heart cries for more than the sapless creed, "I believe in God."

Theism is condemned because it is blind to the Divine presence in the life of man; or because it recognises in the sculptured stones of mental faculty alone, the traces of Creative Mind. It is deaf to the voice of man's moral nature. The power of Judaism was that it discovered embers of the divine fire in each conscience; that it gathered this smouldering, subjective heat into an objective, central glow between the wings of the cherubim. The shekinah was the national conscience cen-

tralized and intensified into white light. The Temple was thus a man in stone ; the ideal man ; the man who had absorbed the nation into his personality ; who had gathered the light of intellect into a holy place, and the light of conscience into the Holy of Holies. The Temple revealed God and manifested man at the same time. So true is this conception, that we find the stone temple with its priests, sacrifices, holy place and shekinah, actually passes over into a living temple, "not of this building." In this sense we are to understand Christ when He says, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it again." "He spake of the temple of His body."

Judaism restored God to the affairs of life ; it revealed Him working behind the world's forces, gazing flame-eyed into the heart and reins, lifting man into a higher scale of dignity by striking in with penalties on the scent of his guilt ; giving sin an objective shape in blood, fire and smoke, and bringing to light a realm of law existing before, and running through all laws. But Judaism, while bringing God's existence within the sphere of the senses, and hemming human life between burning lines of restraint, could do little more than raise men to the stand-point of the third servant. Here and there it nursed a great spirit ; but he was great because he travelled up the stair of types

into the core of reality. Regarding God from the point of law, it could only stiffen into a kind of spiritual geometry—ever dealing with lines ; drawing lines around its national life, its devotions, and its sacrifice. It formed men after the fashion of its own tables, and wrote the law on but not *in* them. Like those tables carried through the desert, it moved on with time, environed in an ark of prejudice, almost as much hidden from the world as the evil servant's talent. The elements of the Divine character which were held in the background of revelation, slept also in the background of Hebrew thought and life, and the highest conception of the Hebrew genius was to *sit under its own vine* among the shadows of an unaggressive economy. *This spirit crossing the Christian line is the wicked servant.*

Christianity gave to society a new side, or, more strictly, a new man. It restored to the soul all that the soul had lost, and ripened all its possibilities. We may deny that it brought a heavenly kingdom into man ; but we cannot deny that it called a kingdom of new qualities out of his life. Its first adherents developed a new character, struck out in a young, fresh humanity, from beneath the wrinkled bark of Judaism. As their type of character had never been anticipated, so it has been seldom repeated. Their life daily revolved

around the nexus binding man to God and God to man. They saw God in sacrifice ; they lived in an atmosphere whose light and shade were the interlacings of infinite love and sorrow. The vision which inscribed itself on their soul, was love on God's part identifying itself with man, so as not only to be man, but the Son of Man inheriting all the urned past of man ; having in His spirit the echo of every groan of the race,—having all its wreck and disaster floating along the currents of His blood. Even law, marble-limbed and stern, began to breathe and throb with yearning pulses, and the attributes which in Judaism had sent forth an icy gleam, burned with ardours of living compassion. The disciples were ever looking along avenues of suffering love, and moving in the tides of a new law. Christianity arose sun-hearted upon them and blotted out moral distance, filling like light the abyss with its own essence. Their strength was, that God looked out of Christ upon them,—not an idea or a file of attributes met them, but God insphered in human shape, and girding them with the stress of warm, living light. The Divine Personality thus revealed, begot a new and complete personality ; and the soul tendrils that had refused to seize abstractions, or to climb up the chill standard of law, grasped the Father's heart. Doctrine was bedded in a Person and veined with warm

226 MAN'S POWER TO INTERPRET THE SPIRITUAL

life. The centuries have heaped dogma around the person of Christ, and therefore to a large extent paralyzed His power over human souls. If present inquiry can but lead men back to the standpoint of the first disciples, the gain to faith will be immense. For at that point, the faith that works by love had its birth.

This faith has its root in love; love burning through all God's attributes, so that they are all concerned and engaged in the ministry of redemption. It is the heart borne out to Christ under the arrest of His cross; the conviction of God's love pressing behind it as a gulf stream. When the Scripture says that with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, it means that God in Christ appeals to the heart, opens its approaches, passes through it like a finer sense, draws out its affinities, and burns into it the conviction of a great sacrifice on its behalf. Thus the love of God is shed abroad in the heart, and just here are the roots of the assurance of heart, of the boldness, the courage, the conviction, which draw men into the track of holiness and sacrifice. The soul's conviction of its unity with Christ opens out the entire nature on God. But when the heart is empty of this faith, it is full of panic. Fear enthrones itself an iron dictator, scourges out all finer sense, extinguishes the divine light, and plants between the cherubim a

grim shape of horror. When it becomes a ruling passion it gnaws, cancer-like, through the sinews of life and power ; engraving its coat of arms on the conscience. When fear digs her lair in the Christian fold, she drives the addle-brained into cloistered imbecility. Christians retreat before derision and scorn, dread the innovations of growth, tremble to be right with two or three, doubt whether they have any capability, hesitate while movements are at their tide, and while the mountain burns, shiver in their panic sleep.

It is only before Christ's person and sacrifice that the errand and claims of life assume their true magnitude and meaning. When God is to us a hard man, as He must be when we meet Him in the approaches of physical law, or on the broken altar steps of conscience ; when we fail to grasp the nerve-threads of moral purpose underlying all, when we look into life from any other angle than the cross—we can but scrape a grave for ourselves among the living sinews of God's order, squeezing the wider morrow into the girth of to-day ; we can then only retire into the armour-plates of inert conservation, and appear to keep our stature while we waste within.

X.

**SLOTH IN ITS PHYSICAL ROOTS AND
SPIRITUAL ISSUES.**

MATT. XXV. 26.

HIS LORD ANSWERED AND SAID UNTO HIM, WICKED
AND SLOTHFUL SERVANT, THOU KNEWEST THAT I
REAP WHERE I SOWED NOT, AND GATHER WHERE I
HAVE NOT STRAWED.

X.

SLOTH IN ITS PHYSICAL ROOTS AND
SPIRITUAL ISSUES.

THE Church, travelling up through the generations, throws down her shadow on the clear mirror of this parable. In the outline of the great pilgrim we see an undeveloped, paralyzed side, mailed in leprous sloth, falling short of God's ideal, wasted and emptied of its fire, like the crescent moon. Here is a section of visible Christianity pronounced wicked, and severed from the true, to which it accidentally adhered—a dead body lashed to a living, with the bands of a common name. Taking the parable as final, and as garnering the harvest issues of Christianity, it is evident that the Church, even at its point of fullest development, is no more than an imperfect embodiment of Christ. Christian history is only a partial incarnation of the Christian genius. Till the last, the perfect exists within the imperfect,—bearing not

only the world's cross but the confined members of its own household; pressing into the future beneath its dead Joseph.

These three men were outwardly members of the same spiritual guild; yet we are inclined to ask whether they can have come up from the same planet. For the fires of probation have turned two to gold and one to dross. Nevertheless, they were in the shaping ministries of one economy. The reckoning is not that of the Church and the world, but of the Church alone. The being who falls into outer darkness slides down the side of God's ark, crushed beneath dead possibility. This is a Church sinner, a Church sloth, receiving a ministry in the Church and for the Church, living under the Church's shadow, a unit in the Church's aggregate, a column in the Church's structural shape, environed by Church influence, inertly wasting in the Church, dying in the Church,—a quantity to be separated from the Church's body before it can enter the perfect life and joy of its Lord.

Sloth, then, was the bad genius of this man's life—the ulcer that ate through the roots of conviction and resolve. Here we have the evil servant's anatomy, and the disease that crept along the channels of his life. Behold a man in whom all moral tissue is wasted. He is conscious of fear, not of sloth; for who ever tracks to its spring the

rot that eats out nerve and faculty? The part of wrong is to mistake the cause that fathered it. Dread and its issues are divorced from their true connection, and tacked to an imaginary austerity. Whereas, fear was but the symptom of a disease burrowing among the roots of life. Sloth cannot see sloth, and therefore the servant is as much a stranger to himself as to his Lord. The day that reveals one discloses both.

Sloth had sunken into the texture and fibre of his being. It was the condition under which he was dowered. Its presence may have reduced administrative capability to one degree. Lower in talent power it was impossible to fall; for a man cannot have less than himself. To be a man is to be the guardian of a man. This sloth may have been a family heirloom, an ancestral shield. It was the languid genius that sat by the cradle head, the first image that fell on the infant sight. The boy breathed the air of sloth, began existence in a shell which yearly thickened round his life. A slothful parent is Satan's advocate, pleading against the welfare of the child, freezing life in its springs, checking effort, rolling the stone against the grave's mouth of rising faculty; curbing development, holding the child in an eternal crib—the mere rudiment of a man. To conceive such an influence, we have only to imagine the evil ser-

vant the pattern, guide, and bond of a household. From such a presence joy takes wing; enthusiasm sinks into its own ashes; the family follow the hours at a distance,—every day dying deep in arrears. Occasion and work come hot together, waiting for the stroke of will to smite them into one, but are suffered to cool and separate. A dead father presides over a dead family, undrilled in body and mind; crude natures clash against each other, being entirely out of stroke and rhythm; for the inward disorder takes foot and stalks abroad. And how can it be otherwise, when every day violated, bequeaths its dying curse, and strangled faculty is ever falling dead and fever-breeding into the springs of life? The laws of God are broken with resolution because the household laws are violated with impunity. The child is ever evolving the Heavenly Father as a conclusion out of the earthly father as premiss.

In such surroundings the slothful servant's roots were imbedded. On such wheel of circumstance he was shaped; smitten as with a die of steel, and thrown into the currency of the world. Ah, how often does home stamp and shape the coin of the human spirit with an evil impress! How often is the nature veined with wrong at the starting!

Thus life meets this fragmentary man deeply warped and withered in faculty. It is plain that

to such a man few talents can come ; it is also evident that if many came they could not be harboured or wisely used. Such a nature is an eternal human bud—washed with dew which it cannot drink, bathed in light from which it extracts no colour, surrounded with growth and life, yet a stranger to both. Instead of giving itself out to light and development, it slumbers in its own dark folds, makes no attempt to force open the sheathing restraints of yesterday, but carries the limitations of the child into the man. Beginning with such poor equipment, to war with the forces that hem him round, he is certain to be repulsed. Nay, he is vanquished before he strikes a blow. It is when shod and armoured by the experience of the past that we overcome. But if a man has been vanquished by sloth, held in the leash of fear and irresolution, he lacks the antecedents that stir the soul, and general it on to enterprise and victory. To what purpose is effort ? Where is the guarantee of success ? Out of sympathy with God and health, he concludes that God is out of sympathy with him. Having harboured sloth he must make house-room for despondency.

Dejection may force an entrance into the strongest, deepest heart ; but a slothful nature is an inn challenging all the tramping crusades of grim, despondent humours, which build up their bloated

magnitude by feeding on the sinews of will and moral strength. A heart sold to sloth is like a kingdom rent with civil rebellion ; the passions jostle in one wild clash of anarchy. Conspiracy and treason are abroad ; all wrong propensities run riot, sucking the veins of the soul's life ; for will has fallen stark dead from its throne. When a man ceases to be God's servant he becomes his own slave. Having fallen out of God's order, it is not strange that he falls out of God's peace ; for sloth and unhealth are twin-born. If the soul sits down on its dunghill, it may arm itself with a potsherd to scrape its sores. Indeed, one of the heaviest strokes that can fall on spiritual life is to throw back that life upon itself ; to cut off its outgoings in activity and iron-armoured will. The most perilous test of faith is the removal of outward trial ;—when the sword is forbidden to the hands of faith, and the wheels are slipped off the axle ; when the soul is barred down in the dungeon of a shattered frame, no longer able to lift the arm of a brother's cross, or to bear down with cheer on the Gethsemane of a breaking heart. Then the soul loses the heat of motion, and feels as if a sun had died in its sky. It has ever been when sitting inert by the rivers of Babylon, that the believing heart has groaned out its lyric of sorrow. And hence our great foe failing to shake the heart's

calm by shutting us in with poverty or loss, can set us down among the ashes, through gnawing off by leprosy the media along which the soul throws out its energies.

The soul in health has a double action—it goes out for help to God, and out in help to society. With reference to the first action; between the heart and the Lord in the far country, a wasting journey often intervenes. The rind of materialism must be rent; in other words, faith must make a way for itself into the supernatural and absolute; all the trenches of sense and doubt must be carried; self put to the sword; the lines of custom and habit broken; the border land of bad powers crossed, and the passions built into upward steps to God's altar of sacrifice,—before the spirit can reach a basis of certainty and equipoise in truth. As God came to man in garments of blood and tribulation, with strong crying and tears, so man comes to God broken, cross-bent, and thorn-crowned. The gate of faith and life is still the scene of violence, and must ever be carried by storm. This inner conflict stretches faculty tightly on the rack, but the rack becomes a harp-frame strung with singing chords.

Even with revelation in our hands, with the Redeemer's cross in our midst, and the sunlight of Christ's life surrounding us, it is the mightiest effort the soul can know, to come to God and to

walk in Him. The roots of the religious instinct, guided by the scent of water, have still to dig their way to the life river. The experience of the past cannot even be conceived till we have lived it. To us, in our individual search after God, the path is as new as if it were not deeply worn with weary feet, and washed with human tears. And even when the agony of the new life has subsided, and the soul has arisen from its baptism of tears and flame, the soul's agonistics proper have only been inaugurated. Then begins the soul watch, the entrenchment of the spirit behind the unshaken truth, the stern grapple with passions woven into our nature. A thousand times is self bound to the altar, and as often does the victim break its bonds —till, baffled and defeated, the spiritual chivalry well-nigh breaks down—bitterly crying, “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” Whatever words are most incompatible with sloth, most suggestive of strife even unto death, the Spirit employs to symbolize the soul-movement of the new man—groaning under ignorance, groping for truth, ground against the angles of doubt, ever bearing his anchor shoreward and ever blown into the depths; his heart a capital where thoughts from all points of the circle crowd and warp; filled with the discordant hum of different accents, stirred by living inspirations, and

by gales which sow the seeds of death ; shaken and torn by intestine war, the armed onslaught of its own populations.

The new man not only struggles upward, to have the eternal law written in his nature, but comes down in love and sacrifice to give that law to men. As related to God, he might say, I seek ; regarding man, I serve. The inheritance of the talents constitutes a man servant of the race. Christ is servant of all, because He heirs all the fulness of God. Divine possession draws down on the heart the burden of human griefs. The more a man is filled with the love of God, the more is he entered into the work and cross of God. He who has seen through the rent veil into human life, becomes a sacrificing priest. He who has drunk inspiration from Calvary, confers not with flesh and blood ; consults no code of expediency ; for his life is not his own ; the point of rest is the altar of sacrifice. The dowry of enthusiasm, sympathy, and love, is invested on behalf of men. Then comes the care of the churches, the vigil for souls, the fiery cross burning into the spirit, the strain on faith, the tax on endurance ; the soul goes out on its pilgrimage of passion, entering the lists with consecrated guilt, holding by when unable to bear the cross, giving the bread of its broken life to feed man's famished instincts.

The resolute calm which flung its shield before the heart of early Christianity, derived half its power from the love that led men to give their own souls for men. Having suffered for others, it became easy to suffer for themselves. Living in the spirits of others by a divine possession, Christ made His abode with them. It was easy to ascend in the flame of martyrdom, when there had been a descent in the fire of enthusiasm. The opening page of Christianity is disfigured by no gloom because it is marked by no selfish indolence. The fishermen and tentmakers have chanted the gladdest lyrics in the literature of the world. The hard shaft of their cross struck out in bud and branching shade ;—as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. The star of joy kept burning before them, because the world's cross ever pressed upon them. Inwardly, they ate a bread unknown to the world, for they were deep in a will which the world despised. It was when Christianity lost its early fire, when it subjected sacrifice to contemplation, and ceased to travail in birth for society, that the peace of God gave way to jaundiced dread. When it relaxed its grip of the divine in man, it lost sight of the fatherly in God. The hidden talent brings on spiritual eclipse. The only legitimate hiding of a human heart and its forces, is in God and in the souls of men. A living man may sink like spring

heat into the texture of society, he may engrain his life in other lives, he may descend into the poisoned springs of being, sweetening them, stealing down through the fissures of want, aspiration, affection, faith; saturating other minds with his thoughts, ardours, and impulses. All the master spirits of our race have thus buried themselves, and as a consequence have had no other grave. Their memory passes like a sea-breeze over the jaded world ; they are still a fiery muse, an inspiration behind the world's brain.

They who so hide are deeply set in God's peace. But when the soul suspends intercourse with Christ, ceases to feed on the unseen, ceases to run, to fight, to press ; when its only effort is to compose itself amid the uneasy surf of human care and passion ; when it runs the shears across its affinities with God and its sympathies with man, then the troubled dusk of doubt sets in ; life becomes a valley of death-shadows, and the heart a lair of black death. When we cease to believe what is, we begin to believe what is not. Of scepticism in the abstract, there is none. We may choose what we shall accept, we cannot choose whether we shall trust. None are so much the victims of credulity as those who reject faith. The slaves of the supernatural are its scorners. The spiritual when denied credence invades with fear ; for when faith is in the decline

dejection is in the ascendant. Those who believe in God reject shadows, as those who reject God believe in shadows. No life is so hag-ridden as that which has emptied itself of its religious furniture ; it is ever trembling before some dark contingency, ever curtained in with an atmosphere of pallid awe ; feeding a harvest of parasites, carrying within the carcass and the eagles, heating its own furnace, packing present and future with furies self-created. What wastes the soul like the friction of doubt consequent on buried attributes ? Yours is the fight who have never fought ; theirs is the rest who live in their armour : you are the victims who have never sacrificed ; they are the royal priests who have crucified themselves : you who blaspheme enthusiasm are consumed with the enthusiasm of fear ; you whose lives have been a continual celebration of the obsequies of conscience, are hunted down by conscience ; you who have digged a grave for divine law, find that the living has no tomb ; you who have sung your souls to sleep with the hymn of the rich man, cannot shut out the undertone — “ thou fool.” Are we to bemoan the men whom the zeal of God’s house has eaten up ? Are the ministers, the philanthropists, the missionaries, prematurely consumed and worn, to receive the world’s pity ? No. The cross-bearers, the men with a Gethsemane in their life,

can look out of the depths of their sacrifice and holy calm, on the selfish, the luxurious, wasting under the steels of inertia, and say, "Weep not for us, but for yourselves." Despondency born of sloth, needs no gospel so much as the call, "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard." When gangs of unharnessed faculty hang idly in the gates of opportunity, they act as a blood clot in the heart of Christian joy and faith. How can God be revealed to the sleeping Church or heart? It is the earnest wrestler with the problems and claims of life who sees God face to face. The soul deep in God's sacrifice, draws down from heaven a glowing stair of linked evidence ; it sleeps its re-creating sleep on hard, rough, unhewn circumstance ; it builds a sanctuary for God with the darkest hours of life ; and leaving the roadless waste of speculation, finds through faith, a gate into the rest and strength of truth. But despondency cherished, settles into confirmed unbelief. The very existence of faith depends on its exercise. Whatever suspends the action of trust, subtracts from the sum of its power. Doubt is to faith what disease is to health. Faith is born of doubt, but doubt when cherished devours its own offspring. Despondency is the gloaming of the heart, a state of woven light and darkness. When it becomes the temper of the spirit, light gradually dies out. Nor is light the

only loss, for with it goes the perceptive faculty. In a deep sense we are saved by hope, for if faith is the soul of Christian life, hope is the soul of faith. The heart that hopes all things believes all things ; hope being the condition of faith—the divine water-scent feeding its roots. When hope gives way to despondency, the soul swallows up its faculty ; faith itself falls into its grave, and with it resolve, aspiration, and all the energies that centre in the vertebral shaft of the moral life.

The evil servant, according to a strict subjective analysis, was first slothful, next despondent, next fearful, and then wicked. Wickedness occupies the first place in the Lord's charge, inasmuch as the aim is to bring to the forefront the wasted life in its results on character. Wickedness is contained in sloth as in a potential seed life. The stages of decline or evil development are not traced. The respective conditions of the soul, when endowed and judged, are merely brought together. Thus the one man appears as two ; for when endowed he is only slothful, when judged he is on the plane of positive wrong. But this dual man is one ; and within him are all the jointed growths which lie between sloth and determined wickedness. Given sloth, dejection is certain ; dejection results in unbelief, and unbelief in unrighteousness. Sloth will not remain sloth, as twilight

will not remain twilight. Indolence, like the gloaming, ever draws midnight in its track. To be idle in God's kingdom is not to stand ; the sleeping heart burns out its oil, and he who falls asleep in the light, awakes in the dark. Thus the negative becomes the positive, the part becomes the whole, the downward steps lean on each other ; they who begin with burying their gifts, will end by denying their God.

And here it may be remarked that the sway of the physical nature in the fashioning of character and principle, is not sufficiently recognized. It has been the wont of religious thought to contemplate man too strictly as an intellectual and spiritual being. Our theologies have left unexplored the region where the spiritual and corporeal intersect each other. They start from the second tier of being, as if religion began there. It was only at its dawn that Christianity began with man's physical nature as the basis of spiritual reformation. Christ laid such practical stress on bringing the body into the service of religion, that an ordinary onlooker would have seen in Him one who merely wrestled with physical disease. There is no example of our Lord striking into the soul with health and rhythm, while He left the body sweltering in its disorders. We gratuitously assume that Christ selected the field of physical disorder, more as an

escape valve on His sympathy, or as a theatre for the display of His miraculous energy, than from the religious necessities of the case. How often do we hear Christ's healing treated as if it were a line of policy, by which He carried the approaches of the affections. These considerations doubtless had a place in our Lord's mind, but had they a primary or even an important place? There is more reason to believe that Christ in freeing the body of its distempers, was creating the necessary condition for the sovereignty and development of the religious life. It is certain that He lifted bodily healing into a spiritual plane. In most of His cures physical and spiritual health meet and complement each other; for He is the Saviour of the body. Piety of the Hebrew stamp might struggle on under the conditions of disease, and yet fulfil its ideal. But Christianity was of such a vintage, that it demanded new bottles; it needed as a basework of reaction a frame set in the harmonies of health; the very play and sacrificial movement of the Christian genius called for a new corporeity to arm it with adequate instrumentality and expression. In addition to the reasons generally assigned for Christ's choosing His apostles from the lower ranks of society, there is one which I do not recollect to have read or heard. Emphasis is laid on the fact that the apostles were unpreoccupied, and that, being unlearned

men, they proved how little Christianity was indebted to human wisdom. But a consideration of great weight falls out of sight, namely, that only in such social conditions as those of the disciples, could men be found having the necessary physical drill to fit them for witnessing and martyrdom ; for shining through all their human range with a strong and healthy light ; and for driving the currency of the Christian talents with true momentum. The apostles were strung and tempered to moods of health and endurance in the school of exertion and element, before Christ sent them fishing for men. The force of this thought will appear more clearly still, when we remember that the disciples were ringed round Christ as reflecting media, and that some of them were to reproduce their Master's person and work from their subjective life. How would Christ have fared had they approached His biography from the point of a distempered, inactive, overfed bodily constitution ?

The reformer needed by our age, is one who shall urge reformation along the plane of the physical life ; who shall lift corporeal faculty into religious use once more, and teach the Churches that a disordered liver may lead to an eclipse of spirit.

XI.

THE RELATION OF SPIRITUAL FORCES.

MATT: XXV. 26, 27.

HIS LORD SAID UNTO HIM, WICKED AND SLOTHFUL SERVANT, THOU KNEWEST THAT I REAP WHERE I SOWED NOT, AND GATHER WHERE I HAVE NOT STRAWED; THOU OUGHTEST THEREFORE TO HAVE PUT MY MONEY TO THE EXCHANGERS, AND THEN AT MY COMING I SHOULD HAVE RECEIVED MINE OWN WITH USURY.

XI.

THE RELATION OF SPIRITUAL FORCES.

THIS charge breaks in on sloth like the tramp of Western chivalry on an Eastern capital, whose entrenchments are its dreams. The sleep of inertia is rudely broken, the fallacies that fenced off reality fall flat, and the real meets the unreal. The soul is revealed to itself, born—by a birth how bitter!—into consciousness, and baptized with the name of its bad quality. Self-knowledge with its introspective eyes comes late.

Carrying in his heart the cancer of fear, and crouching among the shadows of a harsh lot, the unfaithful servant convinced himself that he was sinned against. He preached the gospel of his wrongs, was the apostle of a heartless fate, persuading himself and others that he was shot out on the line of necessity. Like the majority of men he warred against the firmest institutes of life, fretting away a gifted nature against established law. Like a drop of sea-water imprisoned in its

cell while the tide sweeps outward, he had fallen out of the divine rhythm and ceased to interpret the divine law. The economy that ringed him round was a contradiction to him as he was a contradiction to it, and he is reminded by the Master that, although he, like a cooling fragment, has been thrown from the onward sphere of God's order, he and not that order is evil. He had separated divine requirement from human interest. This is the fundamental error of anti-Christian philosophy—the severance of the world's government from the moral and spiritual life of man. When the education and development of a higher nature are overlooked, when man is not regarded as the meeting point of higher purpose, as in the heirship of ultimate ends, which ends run warp-like down the texture of the world, how can the world-frame appear otherwise than arbitrary? When we deny that God's system is related to man as an end, that is to say, if we fail to seek the harvest on the moral plane—we cannot long hold that that system is related to God as an Author. The present course of things were about as complete without God as without man. It is as reasonable to suppose an organization without an author as without an aim. All the moulding forces and educational factors can only appear at an idle game of chance, till we catch the drift of their

under-soul as it bears directly in on man. Physical man is the sacred land in the sphere of matter, spiritual man is the temple of that land, into which the tribal crowds of design and purpose throng. Strike where we will into the throbbing frame of what we call Nature, we are but dissecting extremities, laying bare a spinal column, the basement of a brain, to which the drift of purpose passes on to be the bread of soul and thought. When we follow the vein of man's physical or mental nature, we are among the roots and feeders of some other life; we find rills of aim shored in and hastening into higher ends. Exactly the same view meets us in the ordinances of human society. They do not more clearly come from Mind than they lead up to spirit, having meaning alone when they are viewed as factors working in the interests of man's moral life. The Gethsemanes and Calvarys of our earthly lot do not end in themselves, but tread out wine for the soul's strength. Sorrow, pain, suffering, conflict, death, which gird us as our grim bodyguard, and which in themselves appear to war against us, are the soul's allies fighting down the issues of sin on its behalf. They are the Ironsides with which God has taken the field against wrong. In them He is working out no selfish end, He is even holding them in their ministries at the greatest sacrifice of feeling.

But the wicked servant was ignorant of this fundamental law in the divine kingdom. He opposed will to will, and interest to interest, thus isolating his life from the life and order of God, and from the life of the spiritual commonwealth. Having failed to identify his cause with his Lord's, he failed to unite himself with the organized institutions of Christianity. Had he but thrown down the money on the exchangers' counter, it would have multiplied itself. We must bear in mind that he occupied a representative place, otherwise we are thrown into the perplexities which have vexed interpreters of the *τραπέζιται*—bankers. Fearing the great perils that surrounded the teacher and leader, he failed to fall into the ranks, where ordinary powers mingle with the currency of related forces. He might have retreated to a secondary place, a line of service lower in reward and less exposed to danger, without breaking loose from the living body of Christ. There is the guild of medium endowment, where men of lowest grades may be woven into muscle running into higher will. A strong man is only strong when before the weak, as the weak are only safe when behind the strong. The talent divorced from kindred talents is unproductive; the associated talents constitute a power; their confederation is a bank, and that bank is the Christian Church—"Thou oughtest to have put

my money to the changers." This is spoken in concession. 'Even on the ground of your legalism, and granting that those who give themselves away in sacrifice find in me an exacting Master, you left an alternative still unembraced.' If trading demanded faith, enthusiasm, resolution,—trusting the money with the bankers involved no such conditions. But a man who is pressed by fear on one side is generally hemmed in by pride on the other. What is practicable is not acceptable, what is impossible seems imperative. And thus he founders between the possible and the impossible, falling back in despair before the one, and taking no refuge in the other. He grudges that one is not five, and fails to make it two.

It is right to despair of success as a unit, it is wrong as a member of the great Christian confederation to doubt success. The Church of Christ enlists in its service all degrees of power. It inquires about the genuineness of the talents, not their number. Moreover, paying the talent of Christian energies into the Church is quite removed from speculation. The interest hangs on no contingency. Contact with a living, spiritual republic is another name for increase of spiritual life and power. Mingling the talent with other talents produces definite usury. Living near the Shekinah of the Church's enthusiasm fires the soul with

kindred zeal. A spiritual society gives out its life as unconsciously as the rose its fragrance; with as little effort a quickened heart drinks this influence. The spirit of man still ascends on the spirit of man. The mantle of power falls from the upward chariot of Elias. Christ kindled the fires of a new kingdom in the united spirit of His students. In their aggregate humanity He could have a second incarnation. To move in the society of one was to feel the influence of a spiritual unit; to live within the apostolic ring was to be influenced and environed with an elevenfold power. The societies which in the New Testament are called Churches, were founded on the principle that humanity can only express its power collectively, and that God can only bring all His fulness and all the attributes of His character into men when they are united in brotherhood; "in whom ye are builded together for an habitation of God."

The highest Christian type grows by carrying men on in the currents of its convictions and inspirations; the lowest and commonest increases by putting itself into an attitude in which it can be played upon by the tides of higher natures. The necessities of both draw them together. The union of life with life is the only consistent attitude of the individual Christian, and this union is level to any degree of spiritual or mental endowment. To stand

in sullen isolation is to violate the social instinct of faith, to resist the profound gravitating institute of the heart, which pole-like sways the spirit even in the dark. The alliance of spirit with spirit is not an effort but an instinct; attachment to the risen Lord draws the brotherhood with one accord into one place. Weakness is never so weak that it cannot clutch the hand of strength, or so far forlorn that the chariot of a great occasion does not bear down upon it. The Christian economy, like the mother eagle, lifts unfledged strength into the light which nourishes the soul's wings with its warm essence. When power is not within it is around us. What is a bar to the unit is a stair to unity. The smallest talent becomes great when associated with the multitude, as the thread of steel which constitutes the sword's edge is a force because unified with the weight and strength of the blade. Talent is only weak when alone. Buried in the flesh it dies; thrown in with God's enterprise it grows. But whether a man engages in bold or embarks in lowly service, he must give out the entire sum of his soul forces, and have his real being in the spiritual body, moving responsive to its heart-strokes.

The talent returning to its Giver without interest, having fathered no new cause in the chain of causes, is the image of a dormant, undeveloped life—a life

of beginnings wrenched off from issues. It is, as we have seen, the empty outline of a purpose which has lost its day for filling, the broken sketch of a projected soul hymn. The unwrought design is one of the unfulfilled ideas of God, where human liberty has shattered the crystal of the divine purpose.

This failure would have been averted had the servant and the bankers been brought into relationship. There may be waste of power through want of true connection with other power. Legitimate success is founded on law. All depends on our attitude towards the great outstanding institutions of life. We may live in the vicinity of the exchangers, who would gladly pay interest on our talent, and yet go to the grave with that talent solitary, unworn, wasted. The young Christian has to choose how he shall invest his spiritual gifts. To what surroundings shall he unite himself? Shall he lead or serve in the ranks? Wherever he stands, three lines of action strike out—trade, the bank, earth. His attitude to these, not his endowment, determines his future. Let him grasp the truth, vital here, that every man is the complement of some other man; that human lives, to compose a unity, must, like the Evangelists, be woven into one. The four Gospels are not more necessary with their different Christ-aspects, to

bring out the one Christ, than they are in their subjective character, to give the world the one new typal man. It is in the fire of some man's love, or in the ark of some man's experience, that we ride out the gale of life. It is ever some pure heart that has descended on our Gethsemane, some prophet of hope and enthusiasm who has shot with fire the cloud of our despair. When standing pale beside the ford of doubt, some strong arm has waved the dividing rod, and our difficulty has become the grave of our difficulty. When sorely bleeding in soul, some hand of spirit has drawn the iron out of our heart. Rising higher, it is contact with the Man Christ Jesus, that knits affinity to affinity, that gives to the soul its complement, settling it in its polarity.

Intellectual man is not the absolute in the universe. If he is the absolute of intelligence, and at the same time possesses the religious nature, he must then worship himself. But the moment he stops within himself or, since this is impossible, attempts to stop, he arrests the play of his deepest instinct and checks the growth of the true man within him. It is only when the soul recognizes itself as the finite coming from the Infinite, and finding its rest in the Infinite, that it falls into its true place. There is no gospel more hopeless than that which throws religious man back with heavy recoil

pon himself. And it is all the same whether this result is reached by lifting him out of the range of need or urging him into the freezing extreme of insignificance. In either case he is shut out from God ; in either case he is shut in with a talent for which there is no scope, and of which he can give no account. The flower of the human tree is on the spirit, and there only when the soul anchors its roots in higher Spirit. If there is a religious talent in man, there is a bank from which it has issued. The spirit that stirs in man is not the only spirit. The fact that it is dragged out of its grim orbit upward, proves that there is an Absolute beyond,— a “Father of spirits.”

Humanity, like the rind of the earth, may have passed through many transitions, but the spirit of man has gravitated as uniformly to God as our planet has gravitated towards the sun. If the life of man is imprisoned in matter, insphered in earth, bolted down in its narrow den, with no gate of escape into the spiritual, with no well-based conviction of a Father Spirit in whom it may live and move—we meet a strange anomaly—a life without scope to develop, a germ principle for the growth and sustenance of which no provision has been made. As the eye supposes light, and the dyes of the lily the perception of beauty, so the human soul implies God, and the existence of humanity is the

argument for Deity. The effort of the soul bud-like to force its way out of self into a higher Self, the spirit-current setting strongly and eternally Godward, leave behind them a fact greater than themselves.

The pre-Christian ages burnt themselves out in their search for the doors of this exchange. Christ has brought them to light. He has covered with His charter the religious instincts. The soul can attach itself to the certain, the Absolute, under the royal law of faith. Christ so revealed the spiritual, that to live in and for it is to run no risk. Security is given on principal and usury. Speculation is all on the side of those who live without hope. The good even here have proof of security for being good, the bad, scent in their conscience a fiery retribution. And hence, since Christianity is only the commerce of the spirit, a man of business cannot be a consistent infidel.

The bank offered security and interest, the earth neither. In hiding his talent the servant could expect no usury; he ran the risk of losing all, through false surroundings or through his Lord's displeasure. The Master assumes that he is conscious of these facts. For Christianity is in no way removed from the sphere of common sense. Like the inverted pyramid of fire hanging out of the dark, it may end in mystery as it ascends, but

at the point where it touches the soul, the world, and human life it is self-evident. Its sanctions, though not hewn out of the intellect, call forth its approval. The law of reason was against the unfaithful servant. Even though we admit his premises we must reject his inference. There is a "therefore" which he left unreached and unfulfilled. It is the same with every man who pursues a similar policy. "Therefore thou oughtest" arises out of his nature like the base of a column, waiting till it be crowned with the shaft and capital of a legitimate sequence. Everyone doing wrong or stopping with half the right, or leaving a side of his nature unused, or violating the institutes of the moral sense, is conscious of a "therefore" pointing to a divine demand. It is this outcry of conscience for action worthy of conviction, it is this base-work of possibility suggesting what might be and reminding of what is not—that constitutes the sinner's heart a serpent's den, filled with the moving coils of sting-armed reproach. The words "thou oughtest" are echoed by the deeper, better self. Hence the outward demand harmonizing with the inward law—the servant is dumb. His excuse breaks down before the bar of higher self.

The conscience may have long slept, but the voice of the divine word, like the accents of a mother tongue, awakens it. A thousand times has

it used these words before—"thou oughtest ;" but this line of duty was never even attempted. Failure did not succeed effort. The threshold of this opportunity was not trodden by the timid servant. Unattempted duty stands against his name. Life threw down the challenge before his face, but he failed to accept that challenge. At this point he was not beset by fear, inability, or insecurity. He refused to follow the course by which he could not lose. Men who are hemmed about with perplexity or galled by the edge of uncertainty, have one safe line left—the line into character. Godliness is sanctioned by conscience, reason, and natural law. Beyond this it has promise of a life to come. But mark the inconsistency. He who considers his Master hard, least prepares to meet such a Master. He leaves the whole contract unfulfilled. If he refuses to meet the reasonable, will his Lord be content with the unreasonable ?

He has never yoked his plough to the team ; only in name is he a servant. He remains a man of negatives, sliding into the lost condition between two positives—honest good and resolute wrong. The bad kingdom settles round him like water over a corpse, or around a stranded ship. He sets in play no wave of healthy influence. No cross attracts him ; heavenly influences may play around, but they no more draw him than the magnet drags

the pole-star from its rest. He possesses power, but is not a power. He was ordained to transmit influences, but cannot even receive them. His heart, like John's sea of glass, may be trodden by the whole cohort of God's ministrations without receiving any print or trace. Years have come and gone and left him as they found him, as unconscious of their flow as a rock in a torrent bed. The great world-drift has shot past, clothing him, immovable in his sloth, with the stiffening mail of retribution, leaving him on the plain of history with this inscription :—In God's kingdom it is death to pause.

We every day meet men in whom some talent is buried, men who have subjected the heavenly to the earthly. In them the spiritual is all that sleeps. Over the hidden treasure and out of the concealing soil springs a carnal harvest. But the soul is deeply inserted in earth, pressed down and imprisoned without gate of escape. It has never gone out in sacrifice, in love, or faith. Crippled with care, paralyzed by fear, drugged into sullen sleep, held in darkness, shut out from the living God, wrenched from the commonwealth of spirit, it abides alone, an impotent power, a shell in which the potential has wasted away. Every day meets all such men with the challenge "thou oughtest." Every hour repeats that challenge. The interest of years is

already lost. But usury is required to begin with the endowment. God will know why we stand all the day idle. It may be that with some the imperial work of life is yet uncommenced. Some have made no effort to carry the religious talent into God; they have not begun to dig the earth from the spirit. Perhaps even the hiding process goes on; layer after layer is laid on the talent which sinks deeper and deeper into the flesh, every day fencing it off from God by thicker walls of separation, till like a buried magnet it ceases to move in the commerce of divine attractions. Has the grandest act of our life been to receive? Is the great effort yet to be made? When God points to the exchange and says 'thou oughtest to put My money there,' do we set in play a counter will? There are two great questions to be considered: how to keep and how to increase the divine life in the soul. If that life be put in a wrong relationship to Christ and His kingdom, it cannot grow, it may even cease to be. Spiritual life may be cast into different shapes by different agencies, but not under different laws. There must be the desire to grow for the sake of growth, the bud asking to be a leaf, the leaf requesting a flower, and the flower praying to be crowned with fruit. The great conception of servitude must be ever present. The *doulos* is not a safe to hold a certain amount of

treasure ; he is a steward of God's riches, a captain in command of God's ark. Nor ought the spiritual servant to forget that he is in partnership with God, that his interest and God's honour are identified. How noble the idea of holding Christ's talent in His absence, of increasing soul-force and influence in the interests of the Lord, of standing firm in the drift of temptation, filling our little life-field with the light and heat of conviction !

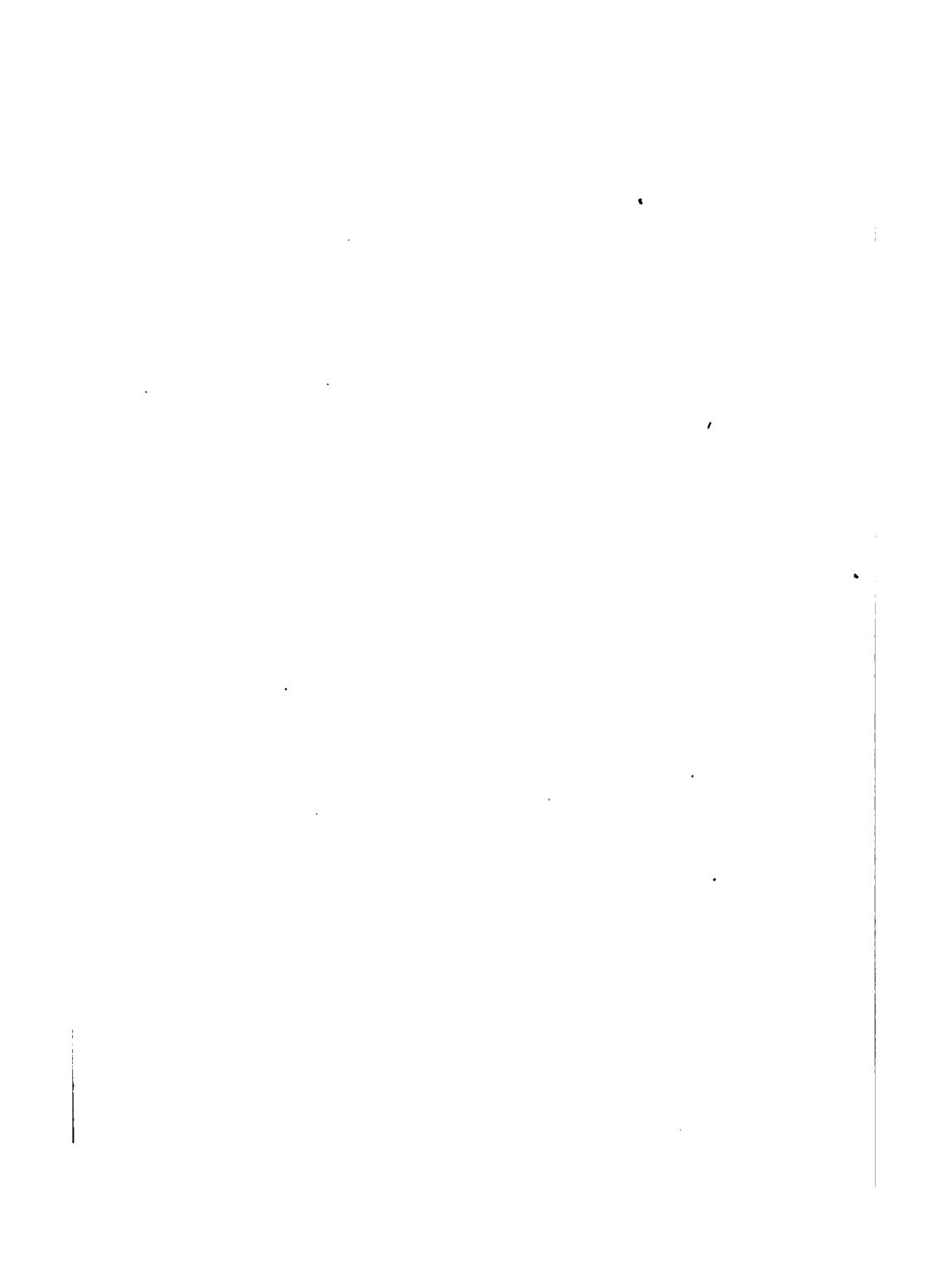
Our gifts must be made available for others, so that the poor may draw upon us. The line of action which secures the greatest influence, touches sin and sorrow at most points, secures the greatest good for men, most firmly knits our hearts to the divine household, and binds our life and sympathies with God, causing us to carry in our hearts a public spirit, a spirit that watches the prosperity of the Redeemer's kingdom as a mother guards her child, is the line along which the true servant is called to move. To-day God says, "Thou oughtest at least to put my money to the exchangers ;" to-morrow He will say, "Thou oughtest to have put." In the one instance He meets us in the possible, in the other we are in the impossible lot. Will this be the end of a gifted being, life wasted before its purpose is begun, or its field sown with causes of the future ? Will a man awake to find that he has drifted past the port of opportunity, and that the

currents of favour have become wastes of hot-breathed sand beneath his keel ? Will he awake to feel that effort on the wrong world and in the wrong day but drives the iron deeper into the soul ; to discover that talent, exchange and earth have passed away, and that he is closeted with the memory of having swung round on the turn-table of his will wheeled and freighted cause to the rails of wrong ? of having carried unquickened beginnings in his life, of having held the approaches of a great future, while now he is insphered in his own bad issues, shut in with the wreck of a wasted life ?

Our Lord broadly asserts that no man is under the necessity of doing wrong. The servant's guilt cannot by any play of sophistry be fathered on his Lord. None of the three *douloi* was the child of fate, or in any way swept on in the tides of a bad necessity. With the talent, the wicked servant did not receive a spade. The Master exercised no subtle, cross influence over him, pressing him on with the drift of a bad constraint to make a grave for his spiritual life. The unholy course was initiated at the point of human will. Had the doctrine that God ordains whatsoever comes to pass been true, instead of the words, "he went and digged in the earth," it must have been written "he went and digged in the earth as his Lord had ordained him." In that case the term "slothful" would have been

inapplicable, and “wicked” without meaning, as then the wicked *doulos* would have carried out the divine will. But the Master indignantly repels complicity in this servant’s guilt, and instead of sanctioning condemns it because it is guilt —“Thou oughtest to have put my money to the exchangers.” The man was therefore not only free to embrace the alternative of right, but was bound to that course by the laws and conditions of his being. If there was any necessity, it was the necessity to obey the right. But what was willed not to be, he willed into being, and what was willed to be, he willed not to be. The parable in its very construction has an eye to the defence of the Divine character, and to disengaging the human will from the meshes of fate. The servants are endowed at the same time and in the same proportion; they surrender their trust on the same day; the same “long time” is allotted to each; the same economy of non-intrusion extends to all; by the same standard all are judged. If any distinction arose, it was created by the circumstances, and was in favour of the bad *doulos*, who had two living witnesses before him, while he pressed down the energies of faith like a body of death. Yet his calumny on the character of his Lord is not farther removed from truth than the dogma which sees in history, bad and good, a mere evolution of the Divine

will. If that dogma is true our parable is false ; for on the dogma the condemnation of the bad servant falls with all its weight. Both dogma and evil *doulos* assign to God what He repudiates : both shift the guilt of wrong from the sinner to the Creator. No play of dialectics can secure a decent morality to the God of Augustine and Calvin. Calvinism and Pantheism break down at the same point. Pantheism is bound to take all guilt as well as all righteousness, all revenge, lust, murder, as the movement, manifestation, or evolution of the world-soul which it names God. And hence its deity can never disengage himself from sin, for he *is the wrong as much as he is the right*. So in Calvinism all guilt that has been played out on the theatre of the world, existed eternally in the Divine will and still exists in that will, and is inseparable from it, being merely an evolution of what is most central in character—that is, will. Nor can I see how Calvinism can escape the eternity of evil, unless indeed it is prepared to say that what exists in the Divine purpose and will does not exist ; unless it can show that although God willed and planned evil from all eternity, and willing and planning evil, had it eternally present in His mind, at once as *purpose and desire*—that notwithstanding this, evil had not an eternal existence.



XII.

THE REMOVAL OF SPIRITUAL CAPACITY.

MATT. XXV. 28.

**TAKE THEREFORE THE TALENT FROM HIM, AND GIVE IT
UNTO HIM WHO HATH TEN TALENTS.**

XII.

THE REMOVAL OF SPIRITUAL CAPACITY.

THE parable has all along proceeded as if three servants constituted the Lord's entire household. Now other ministers come to light, those who in Luke's Gospel "stand by;" who transfer the talent from the *doulos* who had one to him who had ten. That these should remain out of sight yet near, is true to fact; for in every life there are those who wait unseen girding the unconscious soul around, and often, as in this case, coming to light only as ministers of retribution. They are man's ministering angels while he is a faithful servant; his masters when he breaks trust with God. In our parable they are dumb, gliding in between the good and bad, like death between body and spirit; transferring the birthright from Esau to his brother, rifling one life and replenishing another. They stand in the Eternal presence; they are the silent, stern, omnipotent laws of life.

There is a law which is ever taking from men their unused talents. It imports at the outset to know that the foundations of our being are laid deep in law, that our life, island-like springing from the infinite, and nursing in its holier dells the roots of paradise, is begirt and washed by waves of wasting influence that dig into the dead heart, emptying it of feeling, gnawing into the core of power, eating out the lingering lineaments of the divine image. While a living soul is built up by these laws, the dead wears down disintegrated by their play. Human life being inserted into such conditions—being subjected to a law of tear and waste, it becomes a question of time how much of a bad man's spiritual identity is preserved. If we regard the wicked as constantly under the law that takes away, it is plain that the nearer infancy, the more remote from insolvency of soul force. Youth, nursing its blossom in the dark behind its unopened armour of innocence, holding in its chalice the scent of paradise, is richer in all that constitutes the kingdom of God than manhood. As the nature unfolds, it gives out its divinity and drinks in the breath of the world. Every day shakes out some dew, sucks out some colour and fragrance. Every gale of passion carries away on its wing something of life; energy, beauty, tenderness, gentleness, feeling, shame, gradually dry up at their source;

and as the bark of trees contracts with the diminishing volume of life, so the soul shrinks and hardens over its wasting capacity. The wicked man stands debtor to the child ; he has sold the child's birthright of hope, trust, freshness, love, purity. Going up without God from childhood to age he has fallen among thieves, those keen-scented, inflexible laws which take from him that hath not even that which he hath. This is why he dreads to awake, having met the image of his childhood in dreams. With the vision departs the angel, with consciousness the wretch returns.

No day can pass over an inert nature without wasting down its tissue, without sweeping away some of the conditions of religion. The three soils of the parable are found successively in every life —good ground, thorns and stones. It is not hard to see at what point of being we are nearest the kingdom of heaven ; nor is it less evident that a wise sower will select the field of youth, knowing that the law which takes away receptive depth brings the thorns and the fowls of the air. Life must assume a body and build up the fabric of its dwelling with such materials as it can find. If sap cannot put on the form of wheat, it will express itself in tares. Life will not remain unclothed, but struggles to be clothed upon. Thus even in the physical kingdom there is a process

constantly operative, by which forces unused in one direction are drawn into another. These life forces cannot be dormant or stationary. They await the root of the vine and wheat as spheres in which they can work for man, but if no such root of opportunity is let down to them, they take hold of thistles to work against man. The law by which they are governed, says, "Take therefore the talent from him." The life energy is expressed in a baser form, and when the forces have thus run into wrong channels and put on deadly organisms it is too late to sow the divine, for the nursing qualities have passed into other service.

Man as a dual being is subject to the same law. As he is a life within a life, a wedded antagonism of flesh and spirit, one nature is ever borrowing from and recruiting its energies at the expense of the other. Each nature has its own talents, and each can draw into itself the talents of the other. The soul can say of the physical powers, "I am a man in authority, having soldiers under me, and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh." In like manner the body can overgrow and absorb the spiritual energies, can invade the shrine of love and faith, and quench the fires of hope. It can subjugate and impress into its service all mental and spiritual powers,—extinguishing divine fire in the fury of its passion

or setting itself on double flame by drawing into its veins a world of perverted desire. In course of time the divine image, like the colours in Reynolds' paintings, is absorbed and disappears. It is on this principle that the darkest crime is so often associated with highest capacity. When spiritual quantity and power of a sevenfold order go over to the ranks of the carnal nature, it is as if that nature were possessed of seven devils. The man in himself becomes a battalion of evil powers. He sins with originality and enthusiasm. He has barred down in the dungeon of his lower self a prisoner that will shake the very framework of its jail—that in its cries for bread, sunlight, and God, will compel him to sweep into its cell all the husks of indulgence and crime that the world can yield. Having confiscated the treasures of the soul, the flesh embarks in a more comprehensive commerce of sin. Among the wicked, crime is often the gauge of perverted capacity. The man of five talents going astray would have led his forces against every breastwork of truth, charging through conscience and the wavering ranks of the soul's finer instincts. The wealth of spiritual resource, the enthusiasm, the deep-rooted purpose, he would have turned against the Lord who endowed him. The nature capable of divine visions and inspirations, the nature opening out on the spirit-shores, drink-

ing their sunlight and their gales, swept with chasing light and gloom, drawn upward by spiritual attractions or dragged by earthly impulse downward, need only be emptied of God to become a throned power of wrong. David's backslidings from grace are darker than the sins of shallower men without grace.

A man then can become his own grave; nay, the majority of men are sepulchres wherein have sunk in death the sister band of spiritual powers. The soul is emptied of its splendid train, swept and garnished by the hands of death. Divine influences are no more to it than are spring winds to charnel vaults; they waken nothing but echoes. Ask for Conscience, it is not there; inquire for Faith, no such name is known; call on Love to let thee in, Love too has departed; ask for Feeling—she perchance is still at home—no response; call on Hope, reposing against her cross and looking upward—Hope is gone; ask for Capacity that holds her chalice aloft to heaven, invoke the name of Fear—both have taken flight; inquire if God is in His soul temple, and the reply is “having no hope, and without God in the world.” It is as if the family train of faculty had descended from its royal chamber looking out on God, and had crawled into underground vaults. It is sunken into the carnal, and like fossil leaves and shells gives out its essence

to the surroundings in which it is set. And now desire after God feeds at its husk trough; the soul, having ceased to drink at the inner, drinks at the outward eye: refused materials for a temple not of this building, it betakes itself to engineering in mud—rearing a sanctuary of wood and stubble. Love to God—the primrose of the spirit's spring—has shed its flower and withdrawn from the light. Upright desire has become avarice, prostrate, clutching the fading world.

Here we catch the secret of the world's madness or bad inspiration. The talent in the earth is a new stimulus to the world, infusing brain and dignity into what otherwise were mere force. And thus man comes forth originating a hybrid world, kneading out another order, creating a new metal in the conflagration of the moral Corinth. It is here, too, that we can see deepest into what John terms the sin unto death, and the impossibility of renewing again unto repentance those who fall away from enlightenment and the powers of the world to come—of which the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks. That can be no other than sin unto death which arrests the heart stroke of the moral nature and paralyzes the religious functions in all their range. Prayer in such cases can have little or no efficacy, for the real want is not illumination, but restoration of religious faculty;

that is to say, the creation of a moral nature. The exhaustion of the will and the spiritual forces lends momentum and diabolic inspiration to the carnal energies, so that they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, dragging Him from the hall of judgment and conscience to the Calvary of riotous, insurgent passion. Christ in His soulward power is thus crucified and dead as far as the individual is concerned. It is only in this light, I am persuaded, that we can feel the drift and pressure of the seventh and eighth verses of the sixth chapter of Hebrews. The man then is like ground that has drunk in the rain frequently coming on it, and that has turned all its sap-currents into the life of thorns and briars. The germs of all higher possibility have died out under the shadow and sovereignty of the heart's bad overgrowth, and the impossibility of renewal to repentance lies in the fact that the rain,—the play of heavenly influence,—but feeds the roots of this over-growth.

This leads me to state my second point; namely, that the continued operation of this law of which we have been treating, takes away all a man's talents. Since the day of his endowment the servant has been under the law of loss. It is not to the point to object that he was unconscious of this law's operation; for in this life we are conscious of

very little. We are so inserted into surroundings profounder and subtler than ourselves that we are ignorant of the forces which sway and mould us most—as the brain is better acquainted with everything than the spirit that inspires it. The command, “Take therefore the talent from him” is not now issued for the first time. Half has been already lost. The law, hitherto silent, breaks now into speech, and along with other possibilities takes away the chance of losing any more. ‘The servant has abused dowry, therefore bring possession to an end.’ As we have seen a life without gain, we see a future without gifts. This life began and ended with a talent; the next commences in insolvency. There was no outcome, and now there is no endowment. We are thus confronted with a human soul without talents, with a nature for ever separated from its dowry, left in the heirship of nothing but the memory of a lost inheritance.

It is well to pause at this angle of vision where we can see the outgrowth of a lost past and the beginning of a barren future. A man in the same surroundings we have never met. In this life good and evil alike are ever passing over transition lines, sliding down or moving up the soul gradient. But the man before us is on the other side of the lost line; he is no longer under the law that takes away abused power, no longer a servant even, for

with the talent have gone out stewardship and the possibility of stewardship.

Are we alive to all that is involved here? Have we adequately conceived of a soul awaking in its bankruptcy of spiritual capability? When those who stand by have executed their commission, how much have they taken away? They have left existence but not life; the withdrawal of the talents is the enthronement of death—death in the deepest sense. The talents are not merely the soul's surroundings, but its furniture. In their removal life goes out like the spirit with the brain. When they are lost the soul is lost, for there is a profound sense in which a man can outlive the death of his soul. The unprofitable servant remains after the divine birthright is recalled; remains in the eternal night of his self-originated world; remains a many chambered pyramid holding the dust of departed life. This is where eternity takes up the parable of time—takes up the wasted skeleton of a perverted past. Here the gates of the lost condition open, and when the unprofitable servant has passed through, we can still catch the outline of the grim fact that although judged, condemned, and strictly speaking dead, he has not fallen out of existence. The words of the parable imply punishment, and punishment set into immediate operation; but no swift stroke of annihilation falls on the offender.

To whatever conclusion we may come, this we cannot easily endorse, that the punishment consists in the termination of existence, or even in inaugurating a process which will ultimately put an end to being. The weight of retribution appears to be, the continuation of being and the cessation of spiritual endowment. To such a nature, in such conditions, would the fear of annihilation or the impotent search after death—in other words, the fear of existence—be the heavier judgment? Is it true that the doctrine of immortality is nothing more than the soul's dread of falling out of existence, formulated? Surely a perpetuity of pain is not likely to create in its favour a universal enthusiasm of conscience, and yet the doctrine of immortality has been held in the teeth of penal fire. It is strange, to say the least, that the soul's fear of non-existence should be so universal and unswerving as to lay the base-work of a doctrine of immortality, while the soul's assertion of retribution bitterer than death is unwavering and immortal. If the dread of ceasing to be lies at the root of the doctrine of immortality, then that dread must be as widely spread as the doctrine itself—that is to say, it must be universal. Now if this be true, no candid thinker can afford to overlook a fact so commanding in itself. A healthy philosophy will reverence facts, and ask on what they lean, and what leans on them: for no fact can

be alone, but is rooted at both ends into soil of fact. Is then the fear of ceasing to exist an attribute of the soul, and yet of a mortal soul? Is it as compatible with mortality as with immortality? Does it even stop at the point of fearing extinction? Does it not more truly reject extinction with the energy of an instinct,—reject extinction as an idea that can never enter into the soul's instinctive conceptions? The soul rejects non-existence as its opposite, its antagonism.

Were it true that evil eats out its own existence, we might expect in proportion to the depth of wickedness some prophecy of the grim truth. But is it not true that the wicked are often possessed with a tormenting consciousness of immortality? Of the three, it is the unfaithful servant who stands in fear of the future. It is a fact that the servant exists without his talent: is it also a fact that he cannot *continue* to exist? When, and why, will annihilation set in? If at any period, why not now? If death means the dying out of God from the soul, that has already taken place. If annihilation is the act of the Creator, why is that act delayed till some indefinite period after the judgment? If for the purpose of punishment it seems strange that an economy of retribution should be followed by an economy of extinction. The theories of annihilation and natural mortality are generally

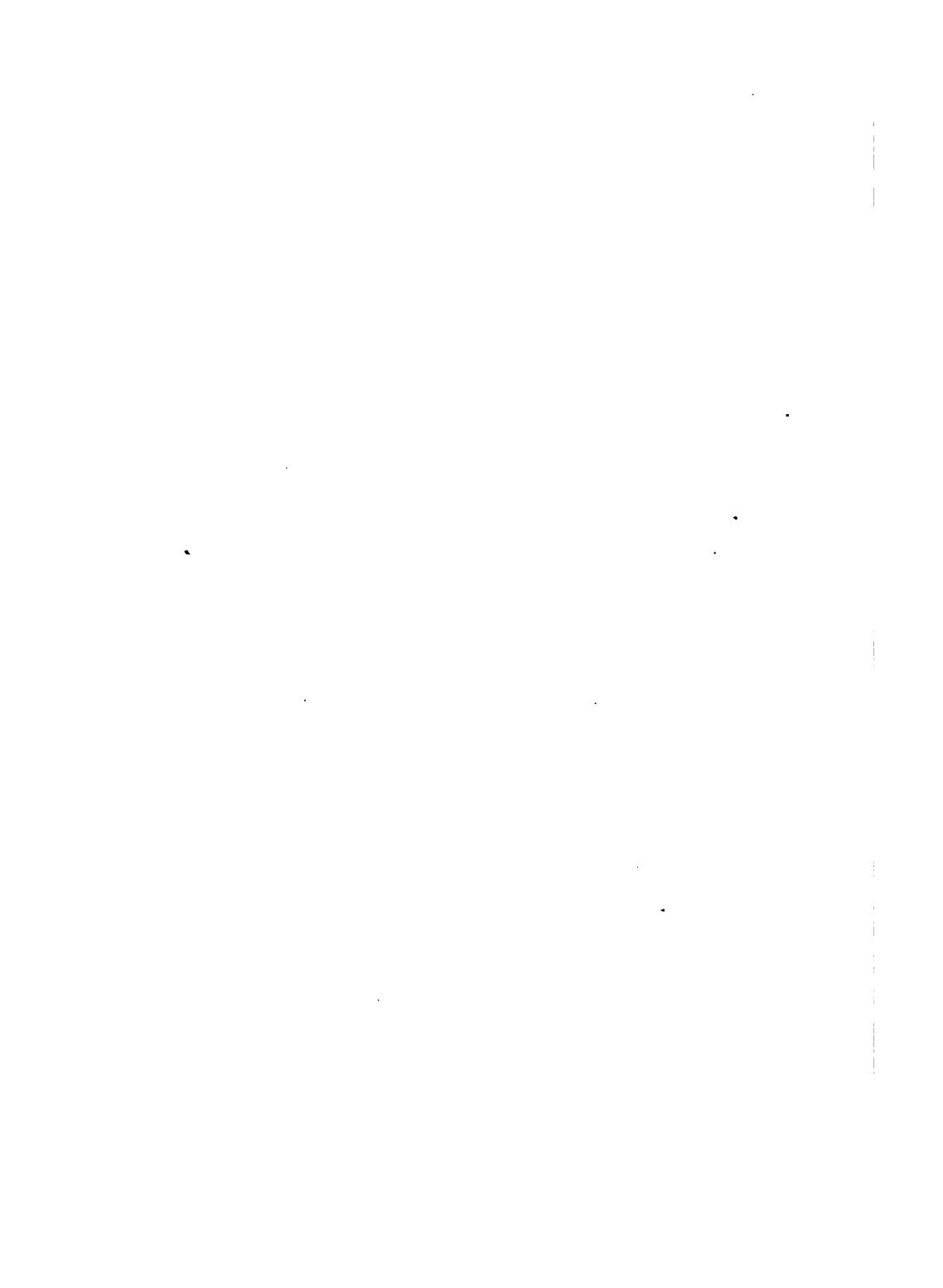
held by those who are careful—sincerely careful—of Divine generosity. But if the soul is naturally mortal the burden is laid on God of holding it immortal till He has spent His vengeance on it; if immortal by nature, annihilation can hardly be set down to love, else why did not the same love strike the blow sooner, and thus prevent the weary ages of woe? The love that terminates existence rather than witness suffering, will prevent as much suffering as possible; that is, it will put an end to being at once. If it be urged that sin has rendered the soul mortal, we may surely expect a conclusion so grave to be drawn from well-established premises. It is not derived from analogy. There are in the universe spirits besides man, some of whom like him have sinned, but when did any of them cease to be? Has one angelic life been quenched? If the theory is true that evil spirits gradually lose their vitality, these ages have little to fear from a kingdom of decayed powers. But human history and consciousness declare the contrary. If sinful natures hasten to extinction, evil itself will ultimately cease to be a fact in the universe. And this is what some assume and place in the front of their argument. The feeling that yearns for such an issue is divine. But we cannot forget that when Revelation lifts us to her last and clearest summit, we see the kingdom of light flanked with outer

darkness. If the darkness is temporal and the light eternal, Scripture does not say so. Even the gulf which divides is "fixed."

If there is little hope of the bad state coming to an end there can be as little of its reformation. Given an iron planet, are you reasonably to expect vegetation, vineyards and forests? But the lost mind is like a world from which soil, seed and life have been washed away. Even the enfolding atmosphere, and with it the conditions of vitality, has been withdrawn. Exclusion from light is not more certainly imposed than expulsion into darkness. Something called a talent has been revoked, not for a time, to be returned on the condition of amendment. For though we must not too closely follow the curves of the parable, we cannot choose but see that what is taken is finally taken and finally transferred. To re-endow the wicked would be to rob the righteous. But if the wicked are to be restored it is clear that they must be invested with religious talent again—either new or forfeited. Not with lost talent, for that would imply the same childhood, the same conscience, the same world, the same surrounding ring of circumstance, the same operations of the Spirit, the same occasions, helps, refining fires. It would imply the first tenderness and susceptibility, the first dawn of hope and inspiration of love, the first soul quantities and capacities—nay, time itself,

with its years of patience and trial, its Christ, and its probation.

As these cannot be restored, neither can analogous talents be conferred. All gifts or conditions to be analogous, must come to the same being or to a corresponding being in corresponding circumstances; but that cannot be apart from the restoration of the lost nature, which is the point in question. Though God broke in on the lost estate, is it not like the summer sunshine on an iron globe? Granted that divine grace and love remain the same, is not talent, their base of reaction, gone? Are we to believe that a man who has on earth so far failed as to lose his soul—as to lose hope and love, or perhaps even the desire to love—will, beyond earth, and without talents for the religious life, come to that condition in which love to God is the first and absolute requirement?



XIII.

THE SPIRITUAL MAGNA CHARTA.

MATT. XXV. 29.

FOR UNTO EVERY ONE THAT HATH SHALL BE GIVEN, AND
HE SHALL HAVE ABUNDANCE: BUT FROM HIM THAT
HATH NOT SHALL BE TAKEN AWAY EVEN THAT WHICH
HE HATH.

XIII.

THE SPIRITUAL MAGNA CHARTA.

OUR Lord lays bare this broad principle as the Magna Charta of the spiritual kingdom, as lying like a base-course beneath the Divine economy. Indeed that economy so shapes into the mould of this statute as to wear the appearance of being formed by, and not as forming it. The principle before us is not the thin, philosophic plaster-cast pressed down into the features of history and experience, but the primeval mould in which the human past has taken figure, held up in a creative hand. To this point Christ's teaching ever recurs: digging through the crust of the human world, it lays bare the underlying die of shaping Mind, and shows that beneath the ebbs and flows of thought and man the tables of eternal law rest. It was this quality of the Redeemer's teaching that broke into the soul with "authority;" the conscience knew its Creator's voice, discerned between the word which

sowed the seed and that which was the harvest of circumstance.

The unwavering tone of this saying shows One reading from a book sealed to other men, holding in His hand a leaf of God's spiritual charter. This point I am careful to press, as it meets an objection which might be urged against the passage, and lets light in on a striking feature of Christ's teaching. If it be objected that to take from him that hath not even that which he hath, is impossible, because it is unrighteous ; I ask the objector to go deeper into the government of the world, and he will meet this principle there. Christ is therefore in harmony with the laws which shape human life. He merely sets in strong light a law which is sovereignly operative in human life. Moreover, the fact that He offers no explanation of this and other principles seemingly open to assault, is suggestive, arguing comprehensive grasp and profounder insight. It is the way of philosophy to search for reasons ; it is God's way to say little of them, doubtless on the ground that to apprehend those reasons implies God, and not man. Besides, the existence of a law and the necessities for its existence are widely different. Christ is ever true to this divine reticence. He carries in His breast secrets of life and death, unlike us, making no attempts to ascertain or explain, but

knowing perfectly, and knowing that we cannot know.

It is clear that Christ gave prominence to the law we are considering; and that He reduced it to the precision of a spiritual axiom. It is recorded by three Evangelists and in nearly the same words —refusing to take on the stamp of the historian's mind. This precise brevity lays it open to misapprehension. "To him that hath shall be given," appears arbitrary, while "Taking from him that hath not," wears the air of contradiction in terms. The latter words are not to be interpreted literally, it is evident, for they were applied to the case of the slothful servant who had the talent. Here we must look for the key to the meaning. The expression "him that hath not," is either relative, comparing the least with the greatest possession, or is to be regarded as the language of profound spiritualism —having, and not having. The first interpretation would appear to be favoured by the circumstance that the abused talent was given to him who had ten instead of to the servant who had four. This rendering, however, would shut us up to the conclusion that the latter servant was not endowed at all. That he *had*, even in the Saviour's own interpretation of the word, is proved by his Master's praise, and by the fact that he was permitted to retain his trust. We must, then, regard Christ as

speaking the language of the spirit, which on human tongues ever assumes the form of paradox. Viewed from the spiritual point, there are those who have, and have not. "Therefore speak I to them in parables; because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand." The spiritual instinct was absent, and therefore the reception of the spiritual mysteries was impossible. The parable that carried to discipleship the in-wrapt fire of God, to such souls as these was a blank. The bush burns when Moses is the spectator. But following the natural order of the thought, the treatment of this branch of the subject belongs to another place. We have before us two simple propositions: First, that to have is to receive; secondly, that not to have is to lose.

1. To have is to receive. Both faithful servants possessed, but only one received. It may be objected that only one could receive, as there was only one talent to bestow. But why give it to him who of the two was the richer endowed? Here is an opportunity for softening down the lines of spiritual distinction. This talent would help to equalise the uneven scale. It is here that a remonstrant world seizes the arm of divine equity: "They say unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds." But the only reply is the enunciation of the law, "I say unto you that unto everyone that hath shall be given." Yet it is

strange that the world, which holds itself aggrieved by this enactment, carries out its letter in a sense unwarranted and undivine. Were it not for the context one might take our Lord's words as a burning sarcasm levelled at the practice of society. The readiness of men to give to him that hath has armed language with some of its bitterest proverbial stings. One would imagine that society had sworn to worship any calf on condition of its being golden. In the Church and in the world, to him that hath is given. Wherever the messiah of wealth is found there are the pilgrims, the gold, frankincense and myrrh.

But this enters not into our Lord's meaning; this is the thick-eyed world rendering a great principle odious by making it its own. The law stated by Christ finds fulfilment, however, in a form so like that just characterised that the one may be confounded with the other. Nothing is plainer in the economy of human life than the fact that above the will or election of men there is a law carrying, current-like, more abundance to him that already hath. This law moves irrespective of character. Natural laws know nothing of moral sentiments. The farmer's character cannot alter the quality of his fields. In the nature of things a thousand pounds must bring a larger interest than one. Practice draws to the physician more practice,—a brief to

the lawyer more briefs. Of two mercantile houses in the same street, selling the same wares at the same price, but not on the same scale, the more extensive will draw its trade past the door of its rival. Fortune is more a sequence than a caprice—obeys the law of an elective affinity—is often merely success multiplied by success.

Rising into the mental world, we find that this law has been active throughout our history. The to-day of man receives more than yesterday because it holds the results of yesterday. Our past has been the opening of the human flower, which, through growth, makes bare its heart to the dew and light. Art, science, and the ideal, have come out on the theatre of thought in proportion as it broadened in the light. If we represent each century as a man, we find that the natural talents and capacities rise in an ascending scale. Each century, standing on a higher plane, is taken more fully into the confidence of Nature. The revelations of the sublime and the inverted sublime, that is, of the infinite in the vast and in the minute, are given to the age of the telescope and microscope. To Greece is vouchsafed the steel of Phidias, because it possessed the ideal of Pallas. Because the Hellenic genius had created a world of legend, there follows the fervent crucible of Homer's brain, fusing and combining the mythic gold. There

could be a Plato because there had been a Socrates.

In the spiritual kingdom, however, we see this law still more clearly at work. Take Israel for example. As Greece was the world's intellectual eye, so Israel was its eye of spirit. To Greece, as an eye of thought, was revealed the world of thought. Climbing up the soul, Socrates and Plato reached the threshold of the divine and absolute. But gaining that threshold they met a final barrier, and stood ringed with higher spiritual light—reverent and blind. Because the intellectual mantle fell on Greece, on Greece therefore descended the intellectual trance. To this eye of humanity were disclosed all forms of beauty, all depths in the human spirit, whether of joy or sorrow. To this land was given the rapture of discovering the real, and of creating the ideal. For in giving to man its sculpture, its poetry, and its philosophy, it bequeathed three new worlds. And, after all, this wonderful land is its own Homer, all eye and yet blind, shaping the Iliad of its life in the dark.

To Judaism alone came the spiritual revelation. Through the entrance of faith heaven broke in on the patriarch's life, and the supernatural which fled from philosophy met Abraham in his tent door. In contrasting Hellenism and Judaism I have said that the one was the world's mental, the other the

world's spiritual eye. Both nursed prophets who drank divine inspiration. Each received its apocalypse : but one lacked the spiritual talent and was denied the spiritual vision. As the harpings, the trumpetings, and the descending Jerusalem gather around Patmos, because John is in the Spirit, so on Judaism, of which John in his sea-girt isle may be called the genius, descends the spiritual trance. In the life of this nation—the parable of history—the law “unto every one that hath shall be given” finds ample illustration. In the furnace the nation meets the God of its great ancestor. To the idea is added the law of God ; to the law, seers and prophets, institution and inspiration. To Judaism is given the last revelation because it held the first. Moses sees the world's first youth, and John its second. The vision brightens. The fire first burns in the bush, afterwards in the tabernacle, then in the temple, and finally in Christ. The humanity that began by seeing God ended by enshrining Him. Viewing the race as an individual organism, an eternal Adam, the light of this Adam is the eye of Judaism. At this eye the whole body feeds ; by it enter the dawn, life, God. To it the supernatural reveals itself. It looks out on spirit, on truth, on essence, on the root and flower of time,—from the urn of the past re-creating the world.

Now, why is the spiritual world given as a fatherland to Judaism? Why is the genius of Judaism ever soaring into the future with unfolded wing? Why is the history of this nation luminous with the burning bush, the moving spire of flame, the shekinah? Why aglow with prophetic rapture and inspired light? Why at this point are the heavens always open, and the mount aflame with horses and chariots of fire? And why does the true light here make a human heart its home? Because the anointed eye and the capacity of spiritual reception are here. Whatever the failings of Judaism, Christ could have appeared at no other point; for no other nation had a Mary, a Joseph, or a Simeon.

The race being no more than the man, and human history merely an individual life hammered out on the anvil of wider circumstance, and always separating into three parts, sense, mind, spirit; Judaism is humanity's conscience, Greece its thought, and the outlying nations its sense. Heathenism had its talent, philosophy two, revelation five. The election of Judaism was the creation of a conscience. Judaism could not be all the world, on the principle that a man cannot be all conscience. The selection of the Hebrew race from others and before others, is governed by the law that divides one person into many members and faculties. Everyone carries within himself a principle of selection

—matter subjected to mind, and mind to spirit. Of the faculties, conscience is the chosen, the beloved disciple reposing on the Divine breast. Because Judaism is the world's conscience, it sees God, and in a manner receives Him. But no Jewish *cultus* can interpret the full revelation. Therefore from the elect nation is elected a class ; within the conscience-nation is created a new conscience, intenser, purer, deeper. This class is of necessity limited ; the ring must be so small as to burn at all points with the central fire. With the growth of this conscience the revelation advances ; "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." It is remarkable that even in this small band there is an inner conscience. Gethsemane with its eclipse of blood and chalice of passion, the mount with its vesture of light and sacrament of joy, are for three alone ; and even to those three the cross must be seen from the point of glory before it can be viewed from the point of tribulation. Of the temptation, the stones and the angels were the witnesses, for he is not God who at some points is not alone with his mystery.

To this disciple band Christ gave Himself. Because they were a conscience, He became to them light, spirit, life. Into their deepened hearts He sank a heavenly seed, died, revived, and struck His roots. To those without, His speech was a para-

ble, His person a profounder parable still ; but to His friends, or the new conscience He had created, was given to know the mysteries of the kingdom. So fully had He become theirs, that when He vanished from the outward eye they looked within and found Him in their hearts. This new conscience alone drinks creative breath in the barred room. It cannot walk to Emmaus without having the Supernatural, God, added to its company. It alone is carried out to Bethany to witness the world's dream realized—humanity on the throne of God. On this spiritual genius alone descend the rush of inspiration and the coronation of fire.

In all this, the law of which we are treating comes out in clear relief. Heaven's pearl of great price could only be set in a pure and profound heart. The soul-star could only burn on the forehead of history when there was depth of spirit in which to glass itself. That Christ gave Himself, or could give Himself, to disciplehood alone, is strikingly seen in the fact that the world made no attempt to reproduce His life. But for the fact that His image lived in His disciples, He would have died out of the eye of secular history, for He had never found room in the heart of secular life. But His life distilled into the cup of believing love. The seed truths, the ideal truth, the sower Himself, found one spot of sufficient receptive depth.

But this law receives daily fulfilment in every experience. He who has spiritual capacity, feeling, religious instinct; he whose eye is opened, whose ear is attuned to the voice of the Spirit, whose conscience is quickened, is a spiritual capital gathering into himself wealth, life, energy, from all quarters. Where there are spiritual branches and roots they want not spiritual dew and currents to wash them. He, therefore, who possesses soul-life builds himself up out of sorrow, disaster, and death.

As the entrance of sin is the loss of the spiritual man, so the removal of sin is the return of that man. Then return the inward eye and ear, and conscience the inward sense. These are so many inlets of God—so many inlets at which the inner nature feeds. Some souls develop to an eye, and then the whole body is full of light; some become a hearkening ear, and are filled with the counsels of God; others deepen into a finer sense, and are therefore continually touching the unseen. Mary's inner life is a gaze, John's the voice of the Word, Enoch's a walk with God. The heavenly kingdom, like the light, hastens to pour in at every opening, and whatever side of the soul is most developed receives the inflow of communion and power. If any corner of the spirit-field is good and honest, the seed-shower will fall there. If the new life has

attained the stature of goodness and faithfulness, it is entrusted with the title deed of its lost inheritance ; the outward vision becomes the inward consciousness, drawing into itself Christ and His kingdom. The soul being inserted into Christ, is overflowed with His feeling, rest, and power. No point of the spiritual kingdom is absent. All the laws, energies, forces, hem the soul, as the sap forces encircle a germ—heaving it out into wider capacity that they may the more effectually bestow themselves upon it. And is this not why a sinner cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven ? Let him mix with the good ; still he carries with him a dividing gulf. The light, the thrill of life, pass not into him. He is girt with his own hell, and since he has nothing in common with his surroundings, none of the blessedness can become his. Though we see the law of giving to him that hath, plainly at work in Christian experience, it nevertheless meets fullest fulfilment after death. Here Christ steals into the heart through bolts and bars. The soul then passes into possession, into knowing all, seeing all, feeling all. Here, ours is but a root life, striking for sustenance into the dark ; then, we rise out of our shell into God and eternal bloom.

2. Not to have is to lose. I have said that the words "from him that hath not shall be taken even that which he hath" embody a profound spiritual-

ism. Absolutely, it cannot be said of any man that he possesses nothing. He inherits the memory and the conception of God ; his heart can never be less than a withered paradise, trenched with the ancient current beds. Even the fallen mind is inwrought with a most rich mosaic of talent, nowhere more plainly seen than in the new earth arising from the crucible of man's creative spirit. Man is not man when he ceases to be a free power, trenching the line of his influence on the face of the world.

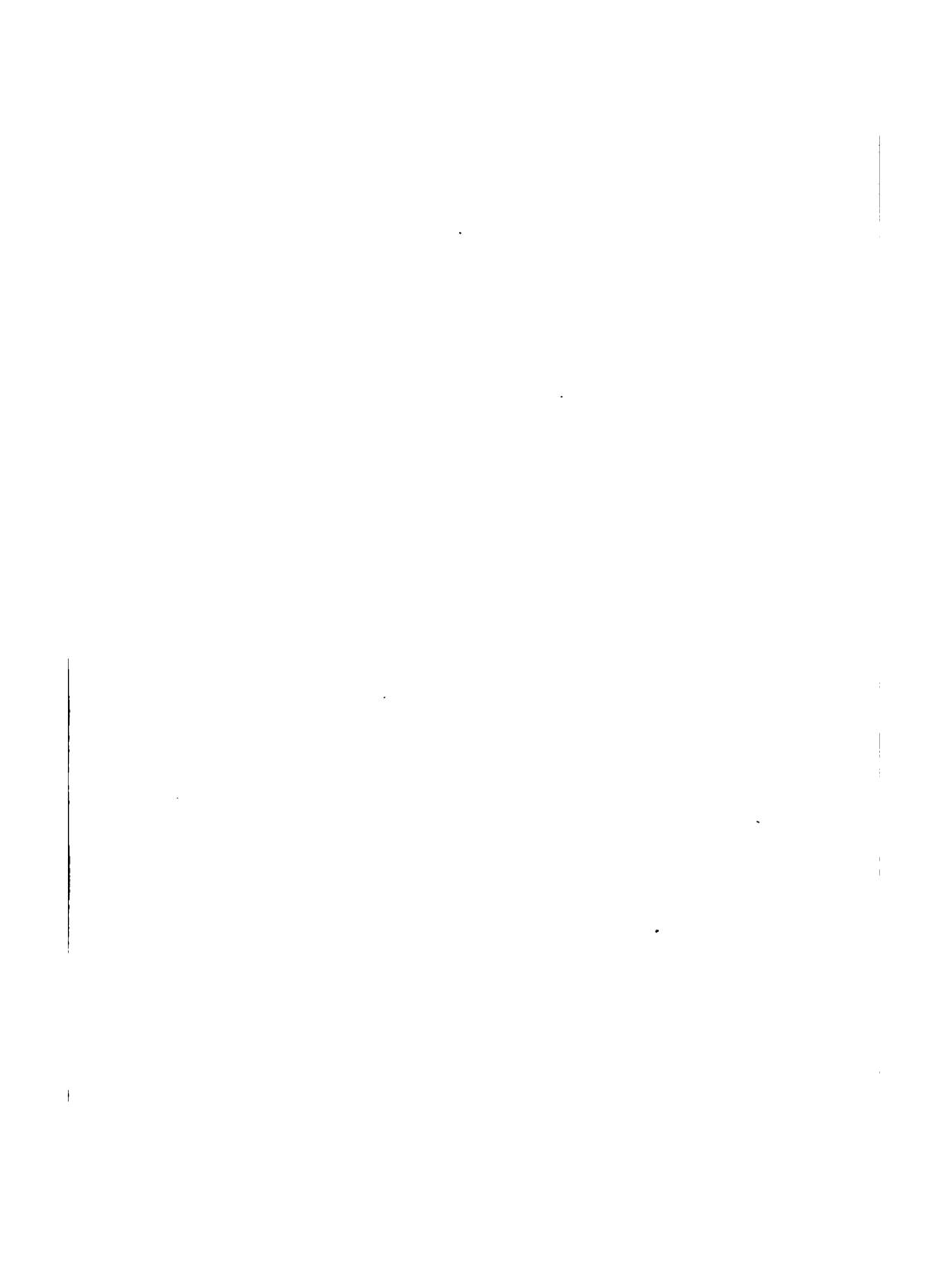
But the kingdoms of matter and of mind are not the only kingdoms ; there is a spirit realm, and Christ views all men in their relation to it. If we are merely in contact with this state, if it is everywhere but within us, if we have given it burial amongst our passions, then we have and have not. Christ spoke of "those without"—a term which contains the germ of our thought. The disciples constituted an illuminated circle, which the Pharisees might touch but not penetrate. The bar was entirely spiritual. The disciples were within the spiritual state, because the spiritual state was within them. They heired the restored ear and conscience. The multitude, on the other hand, were "without," as Christ had found no inlet into their life. Lacking the spirit of the kingdom, they lost its mysteries. Still the light lingered on their eye ; but as light in the new kingdom intensi-

fies, so here it dies out. Christ vanished with His wonders and signs from their outward eye—their only eye. His teachings were withdrawn; and, as every abused season has its revenge, the light became darkness—the rejected Saviour carried with Him, like the setting sun, the day from their horizon. He drew out of their kingdom all that was best in it: the talent of the spirit which they had buried beneath the letter He transferred to others. He left their Scriptures and their history without a key of interpretation. As they had rejected the Christ of prophecy, the prophecy of Christ was no longer theirs. The hope that had steered into the eye of the future ceased to be hope, the sacred types ceased to be symbols, and the ancient faith became infidelity; and because the spiritual element had become smothered beneath institution, targum, and tradition, the chemistry of death hastened to dissolve the very fabric of Jewish society. Institution as the garment of inspiration is good; but what are temples and sacrifices if God has deserted them? Judaism had form without soul, and therefore it must even cease to be a form. Temple, priest, ritual, prophecy, nationality, pass away, as a brain without the soul ceases to be a brain.

We have not, if we lack the spirit of life; but shortly we shall have less. If life with its attendant growth be absent, death and decomposition are at

work. Is the spiritual instinct buried or locked in a corner of our life? It shall be taken away. If we have not Christ, we are not in possession even of our own soul. Still we are level to a grave loss; we are yet in charge of capacity; we are in a lot where great factors are working for us. The Spirit, disaster, affliction, institution, the prayers and lives of the good, are operative on our behalf; but tenderness, re-creating energy, the possibility of second birth, the economy of merchandise, where weakness may lean against strength, will be removed. The weakest spirit has inner revolutions, seasons, a soil of divine occasion; the bleak monotony of soul will be afterwards. The weakest soul is free to go out of its weakness, and to draw into itself the power of Christ. Afterwards, the soul is not emptier than its surroundings. What matter though the bad servant remain a man, if he be a lost man? He has lost the world of cross and restoring ministry. Then may the human germ bid farewell to hope of flowering, when the very former atmosphere has passed away. The conscience can be hushed into sullen rest by the semblance of spiritual inheritance; there is even a certain repose in the consideration that deep in our nature is hidden a talent which we yet hope to exercise: we have the feeling of enshrining somewhere an imprisoned angel. Our fear and sloth seem a religion, and our labour to suppress appears

a pang of growth. "Seeming to have" accounts for many a sinner's calm. Did conscience clearly perceive itself inmate of a bankrupt soul, it would urge to instant despair. But the ritual of falsity in which we clothe reality may yet be removed, leaving the conscience awake to its ungifted lot.



XIV.

**THE RETRIBUTIVE STATE EXHAUSTED OF
THE GOOD ELEMENT.**

MATT. XXV. 30.

AND CAST YE THE UNPROFITABLE SERVANT INTO OUTER
DARKNESS: THERE SHALL BE WEEPING AND GNASH-
ING OF TEETH.

XIV.

THE RETRIBUTIVE STATE EXHAUSTED OF THE GOOD ELEMENT.

THUS the retributive forces break loose. Having cleared the man of his possibilities, they clear the kingdom of the man. The last of heaven is light; when that is lost the servant carries with him nothing but his own scourges. For the good servants there is an inner kingdom, a day beyond the twilight: for the wicked there is behind the gloaming, outer night. There was a common ground on which the three men shaped their past: on that ground they separate; God drawing inward to His joy the good, and drawing the world of cross and hope from beneath the feet of the wicked. The kingdom ends with an entrance and an exodus. This grim exodus comes last, as if divine love were reluctant to bar out its former child in the night. The man is now in the grasp of armed retribution

—an Adam, but not an Adam moving towards the light. For,

1. He is cast into the element of hopeless impotence. The kingdom which he forfeits is conceived as a kingdom of light—a burning circle, of which God is centre. Whatever outlies this state is darkness, because it is outer or remote. When the servant is thrust out he can only be cast into darkness. As the tendency of the inner kingdom is to gather into itself all light, so the outer is an exhausted state. Darkness is the emblem of impotence, inasmuch as it is negative. With light are withdrawn all the great positive factors which quicken, re-create, and restore. Were germs of good left in the nature they must die, as the ministry of quickening is totally absent. But such lingerings of good would preclude the expulsion. We have, then, in the case of those cast out, a nature emptied of positive good and of all tendency to good, and inserted into a lot exhausted of all divine elements. It may be objected that the darkness and the light are figurative; that the banquet hall, filled with light and song, is the underlying figure, and that the exclusion from joy is merely the absence of advancement. Darkness and light may be figures. Spiritual moods and states can only be expressed by physical analogies; but analogies are the projected shadows of hidden truths. It is enough that light and darkness fore-

shadow two opposite states, and that each is formed by the absence of the other. Where darkness is absent, joy is the element: where light is absent, weeping is present and darkness absolute. The two states are such, that when finally settled neither has aught to exclude; the one is absolutely exhausted of darkness, and the other of light. They are drawn apart until a profound gulf intervenes. Casting out is more than a figure of speech; entering outer darkness is surely a new phase of experience. The servant in his outgoing movement is slothful no more. Behind him is outraged law purifying its temple. He is cast out as unprofitable, as unfaithful, as slothful, as wicked, as empty: by authority, by law and equity, and without promise of restoration.

In the state on which he enters is no bank, no talent, no trading: nothing to hide, nothing to destroy or mar; all is marred, all destroyed. There are no gales to carry seeds of power from happier fields. Outer darkness is absolute exhaustion and incapacity. With light, life goes out; the faint light within, and the play of life around, are withdrawn together. Light is the condition and power of life, as darkness is the weakness of death. It is unimportant whether we say absolute darkness or absolute spiritual death. For if any living organism, soul or body, is attuned to light, it is evi-

dent that to fall out of light is to forfeit the very conditions of life. The being who has entered on this dark lot was not made for darkness. As his physical frame is set to light, so is the spiritual. It is as if a man with his present organization were carried to some world destitute of light and atmosphere. The laws on which his frame is built are absent; he is not only in altered but in opposite conditions. It is just here that the sting of the second death lies; the soul is in conditions for which it was not designed. Nay more, it is in a state into which none of the original surroundings enter. It is even a kingdom which God has not made, and in which He does not dwell; where are stranded human wrecks laden with the broken tables of broken law. The divine handwriting is still on those tables, and conscience is a Sinai thundering in the dark. Memory, too, thinks she feels the heavenly light that travelled round each figure on her dial stone. But the soul is a dial in the dark, vainly looking for a morn that cannot rise.

The forfeited talent is capacity, the absent element is God. Put these together: the capacity of life and the occasion and fountain of life are awanting. The absence of capacity is incapacity, and the withdrawal of God is the entrance of His opposite: impotence within and without. But God is

everywhere except in sin ; and where God is not, sin is absolute,—sin without its pleasure, without restraint, uncloaked, unopposed, unaggressive, with no room to break out on paradise any more, but ever turning its fangs on itself;—sin with its issues, and with light enough to disclose its own deformity. The labours, the workers, and the wages have met.

It may be asked, Can the soul live in the absence of God ? From the parable it would appear that it can. If the dark state implies cessation of being, then there is no weeping. But weeping seems an established fact. If, however, it is meant that the soul can exist in a state wholly unrelated to God, that would be to make the soul itself God. A being cannot be absolutely out of God. There is this distinction, however, that the righteous are in Him as the life, and the wicked as consuming fire. If God and sin exist in the universe alongside of each other, God must be to that sin a fire, breaking out in eternal indignation, since all the laws which lie at the foundations of His being are roused into penal heat. God is present in outer darkness, but only in an economy of retribution. This grim empire is not His creation, not His idea, and therefore He is in it only as He is in the pangs of violated law. He is absent as the Light-giver, Life-giver, Law-giver ; as the Father tender-hearted ; as the Saviour in a ministry of

long-suffering love, in a ministry of healing and repression, cooling the flaming blade in mercy's stream. "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy;" still more is the quality of mercy absent here. The light of mercy has faded out, and dishonoured law grim with revenge seizes the soul at all points.

But can the soul continue to exist in a state emptied of good and heated with the issues of wrong? If God support not—and any support is against a total withdrawal—will not the soul die in His hands? We know what we see, namely, that God has laid beneath all, established laws avenging themselves on their adversaries. As our world, shattered and disjointed, strikes out in drought, fever, pestilence, death, and flays the offender with the angles of its broken order, so the mind is a kingdom of laws which when kept pronounce their own beatitudes, when broken, utter their own curse. It is not a question, then, of holding up the soul with one hand and letting loose on it the bolts of retribution with the other. The sinner himself has fired the train of penal causation; for inwoven with his being is a law of punishment. The question, then, reduces itself to this point: Has God constituted man an immortal being or not? For if the laws of his nature redress themselves, it only remains to be asked whether those laws are set in

the power of an endless life ? If the soul is immortal, punishment will not reduce it to mortality. The punishment of which we are treating implies existence after death. If, therefore, the soul endures retribution for awhile, why does it cease to endure ? for then it must have first ceased to inflict that retribution. It seems strange that a law of retribution should become the cause of annihilation : and strange that the soul should outlive one death and succumb to another ; that the same penalty kills the same soul at one time and not at another ; that the continued action of punishment wears out the spirit. Now is this by an obliteration of faculties, say of conscience, and then memory ? If either be taken away, it is hard to see how there is any punishment ; if either remains, punishment continues, and it is not clear that exercise of memory or conscience destroys it. Besides, if the soul is not naturally immortal, and if retribution is set to the scale of guilt, the greatest degree of sin has this effect,—that it carries a natural law soonest to its issue, and thus inverts the order of equity. For if sin be carried to a certain height, who will say that annihilation may not be instantaneous ? Great sin thus signifies short suffering. Must we not, then, conclude that the smaller sin shall receive greater damnation ?

With light, heat departs. Outer darkness signi-

fies the close of the economy of softening and melting feeling : the withdrawal of the Spirit's strivings. Here, everyone is sensible at times of a spring-like influence stealing along his being ; striking its rays through the soil of earthliness down to the roots of the spiritual nature, warming and awakening its higher impulse. Some inward, revealing ray falls on a point in memory's field, and we discover as it were the grave of one whom we have slain, and feel subdued with sorrow. You cannot account for that warm breath which softened your heart behind its armour of ice. Throughout our life here there is a ministry of spirit and of fire, melting the soul into moods of penitence and remorse. Coals of fire fall on indifference from the altar of suffering love ; the life around us is raised to a white heat with love, with sorrow, and with tribulation. The divine Spirit sets on flame our surrounding accidents, environs the soul with a sort of furnace—that in the heat old elements may depart and new be inwrought. Even the worst men are not exempt from this ministry ; waves of feeling steal along their heart-strings ; and up till hoar hair they sometimes feel as if their mother's breath fell on their spirit. Tribulation sinks deep its shaft to strike the current of their sensibility. It is rare to find a nature disfranchised of feeling ; there is some hidden spring

stealing through its fissure of rock ; the ministry of the Spirit is present as a revealing light, lifting the lid of memory's ark and letting in the day on the unlettered law, throwing around the consciousness a ring of fire which at once melts and reveals. This fusing genius steals into the heart in the train of sorrow, seizes for its service the fires of joy, works along the lines of love, trust, and pain, and employs adverse shafts as steels to hew the soul into heavenly mould.

This is a patient, suffering ministry, descending fearless as the light into inward fevers, plagues, and sores ; darting like light into the open grave, where death holds carnival. In outer darkness there is no such ministry ; in the fire there is no Son of Man, in the groan no heaving undertone of God. There is helpless hardness—the feeling that overtakes us here on the back of some tribulation in which we can see no light—not even enough to trace the Divine finger-prints. The soul finds itself hedged with a cold, hard fate, while it settles down on the dead embers of hope's altar fires. Let those speak who have stood on the shore of a troubled providence while love's freighted ark went down,—while their life-star slid into the depths. Did not the currents of life freeze in their channels while the heart closed over its own dead, over its darkness and its sting ?

With light goes out the possibility of growth. Here we must raise in our minds some conception of absolute darkness. Suppose our system grouped around a dead sun, a cold, exhausted globe hanging in the dark. The last wave of light has reached our planet and died. Absolute night sets in ; the last dew falls ; the flowers go to sleep of death ; the earth's crust cools and hardens, and the rivers are stretched stiff in their beds. The ice covers the hills from head to foot with its armour ; the poles meet ; death steals to the root of grass, plant and tree—searches the soil for life. The globe stumbles on through freezing fields of air, without voice or pulse, dead in its shell of iron. Here there is no growth, no development, no mysterious life-architecture. The germs, roots, sap-forces are frozen in their beds. There are no conditions of growth, no light, or heat, or dew, or rain. This is the impotence of darkness. Darkness is not the condition or element of reform. We can clearly see that physically the state described is the opposite of that in which we live ; for nothing strikes us more forcibly than the wrestling might of life and growth in nature—a might ever asserting itself, and out of the rudest beginnings working out the ideal. It appears to me that the outer darkness can only close around the soul's weakness as a conservative incapacity, unable from its very nature to set one

pulse of good in motion. It has none of the factors which work reform. Where is its constructive genius, its inspiration, its living energy? What can it impart? Can it draw out germ life, quicken death, and, being negative itself, work out a character of positive attributes? Is darkness God? I see nothing that it can minister unless its chill and impotence, lying as an eternal nightmare on the spirit. We have seen that it cannot work repentance, that it is not the ministry of restoration, and that being the element of death it cannot foster growth. There cannot be too little faith in the renewing and refining power of darkness, when we remember that in the circle of Christ's ideas it stands for immobility and impotence. Can we hope for great results from the junction of a nature emptied of good with a state exhausted of good? As if inner and outer darkness constituted light, and twofold death were life.

2. In the second place, the servant is cast into the lot of awakened consciousness. Most unnatural night, thou singest not the soul to sleep; thou hast no bard of hope hymning to his lyre in the dark! Unnatural awakening—in the night! This sullen cope shuts in no unconscious lot. If the casting out takes place at death, then the state of souls is not a condition of sleep; if at the general judgment, the evil servant enters not on a course of purification.

The idea of "weeping and gnashing of teeth" involves active consciousness—the keen sense of contrast. Two fountains are unsealed, memory and tears: bitter springs both! It is significant that Christ connects the darkness with weeping; not only preserving the present activity of the soul, but giving it a new intensity. While yielding up his talent the servant seems unbroken by sorrow or penitence: even in the judgment light he stands hard. We are conscious all the time of some unopened eye, of some unfeeling armour developed out of the sensibilities of his own nature. But now the eye has opened, the armour has fallen off, and the soul makes acquaintance with reality. Reason is unbiassed and absolute, and memory has swept the past for her lost piece. One has material, the other is architect, the result is a column in the dark inscribed with justice. The past, real, unveiled, flits through the present. Stay out, O past! In vain: this is the living past; what was, what is!—between these hard realities breaks out the spring of tears. Such dawn, such night! Here comes in the sense of loss. From this point the talent in the earth is sadly out of place, and sloth in an economy so earnest, madness. And now that the past is become memory, that the talent has gone and insolvency come, the anguish of loss seizes the mind. The soul cannot get rid of its identity, nor

forget that it had, that it hid, and that it has not. It has lost the potential strength of will. It can neither choose an evil course nor a good. It cannot choose the good, inasmuch as it is hopelessly inserted in a bad lot, and is ever moving within the circle of its impotence. The two columns supporting the arch of hope are swept away, namely the possibility of two choices. We are ever conscious of standing at the angle of two possibilities, the ends of which merge in light and darkness. We are ever conscious too that our very personality implies liberty to choose either side. We are free because surrounded with conditions of choice, and since the diverging lines meet at the point of our will, we cherish the hope that we shall choose the right. Even when the inner light is dim, there is light lying on the world, and we feel that it is possible to be translated from darkness into light. In outer darkness there is no choice; he who would have light there, must first create it. There is no longer the play of will; freedom has ceased, and this weeping is around the bier of hope. What choice of element, of work, of friendship, of life-lines, can there be? The element is determined, and work in it is impossible, for all are weepers; the cause has passed into result. The lines of good and evil no longer meet before the will. Beauty, light, freedom, hope, the ideal and the power to create it; humanity, life,

and all that constitutes the crown of life, are lost. The soul is conscious that it not only has lost, but that it is lost; that it has fallen from the divine element, from the restoring economy, and from its place in God's plan into the issues of wrong.

The heart heals over involuntary loss; if our soul wealth has fallen into the rifling river of providence, we learn resignation; feeling that the current which carries away brings better wealth. When, however, we stand in ruin self-wrought, conscious that we have let in the flood by carrying away the dikes of restraint, we endure at once the pain and the sense of having originated it. Here the servant stands in a world of his own creation. He has been a free power; he has decided, chosen, willed, and this is the result; and because he chose this line it is his. What another has willed cannot be ours: the soul rejects it as constituting no part of it. Were this darkness, this unendowed lot, the creature of another will—*infinite or not*—there might be tears, but no gnashing of teeth. The soul can maintain its calm amidst the worst creations of another will. But the state of loss is bitter because the issue of personality. The past had two sides, Divine and human: the Divine was talent, mercy; the human, choice, sloth, ruin. The Divine is withdrawn, the human remains. The man is thus shut up in the outcome of his past. There is not a bar in his jail that

he did not beat out on the anvil of time. Wretched creator of a wretched world ! It is here that gnashing of teeth uncovers its dreadful depths. This is remorse ; self gnawing self ; the soul discharging on itself its arrowy war. If fate, decree, or outward determining force had shaped this doom, a good conscience would carry into the dark its own calm light. I cannot but think that if such a state be prepared for man, and man necessarily shaped for it, that the creature of necessity has less to endure than the Creator. What is treated as a thing cannot suffer as a power. Why should necessary obedience to another will bring remorse ? The being may mourn that he should have been ; he cannot deplore what he has done. He must look on the necessity as right or wrong : if right, he can survey a course of righteousness ; if wrong, that wrong he knows is none of his. The unprofitable servant, however, is not a thing, but a free power ruined ; not an atom of the necessary, but a free personality moving above the fixed, acting on the flexible, recasting and altering the order of things as he shapes the features of the soil.

This free being who fashioned the flexible is no longer free ; nor is the condition surrounding him flexible any more. He is no more a cause, and the conditions are no longer means. He has entered on the heirship of his own causations. The memory

of freedom remains: the submissive talent, the plastic earth, the economy of non-interference, save for help and counsel; the diverging course of action, chosen, not dictated; sloth permitted, not sanctioned—are memory's furniture. Mighty factor, shaping the past to the figure of thy will, thinking weakness closeted with the fixed, a universe of violated law and order, fixed in disorder, conscious, sunless, hopeless! is this the harvest of thy choice?

There is an inward, armed accuser entrenched among the facts of a lost probation. It no more accuses another, but itself; it now knows that the charges against its Lord were unfounded; it catches up the terms of the sentence, and prolongs them in the soul—a wakeful accuser, armed with truth and fact.

If outer darkness has a place in Christ's teaching, it must have a place in fact, for the Truth cannot create fiction. If by weeping and gnashing of teeth Christ represents moods of remorse and pain, there is such pain. Had Christ taught otherwise, we could not have reconciled what we know with what He declared; for even here chords of woe break out, and nowhere deeper than in our Lord's own life. We see plainly that the darkness deepens, that the sinner is going to meet his life again, that the two elements tend to separation. The present course of things settles into night on one side and

day on the other ; judgment implies the total separation of the two elements : so that light, joy, ripeness, growth, the power of an endless life, gather into one. This is the ideal kingdom of God ; the other element exhausted, impotent, absolutely dark, as a kingdom of bad consequences settles down on its foundations. Neither state can be witnessed here, for we are in an order of causes. There is judgment here and there, to teach us that there is a God ; there is no comprehensive judgment, because there is a future.

THE END.

